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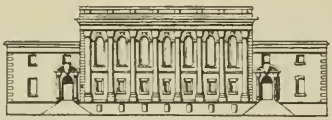

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# THE THEME OF PATRONAGE IN SELECTED WORKS OF HENRY JAMES

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## Introduction

I chose to write on Henry James because I have been intrigued and pleased by his writings and yet never quite felt certain of what it was, beyond his singularly perfected style that so appealed to me. I particularly remember reading The Beast in the Jungle and feeling a continual and compelling uncertainty about the extent of my comprehension, and thus the validity of my response to James' tale. Its meaning seemed to hover between the intricacies of the language and the actual activities related, and yet at moments I was intensely aware of a vision which exceeded either style or incident.

James' treatment of patronage, a topic generously suggested to me by my advisor, Mrs. Winner, offered not only a relatively unexplored point of view from which to examine James' literary cosmology, but one which formed a link between several Jamesian themes, notably the strong strain of heroic self-renunciation, the sin of the usurping consciousness, the question of art and form versus life and movement, and so helped define and put into order elements of my own sketchy appreciation. I believe, for this reason, that James' attitude toward patronage as expressed in his novels is worthy of examination.

In order to do this I chose six novels, ranging throughout James' career, and examined them particularly in their use of this theme. This is not intended to be, nor is it, a compilation or summary of critical opinions on James' use of patronage. I did, however, consult a number of major critical works on James and listed in the bibliography are those which I found particularly useful.

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## Watch and Ward and Roderick Hudson

Watch and Ward (1871) and Roderick Hudson (1875) are both marred to a degree by melodrama and insufficient characterization, but recognizable within each are themes which were to distinguish Henry James' later works. While Roderick Hudson relates the titular artist's initial creative impetus and subsequent moral degeneration within European society, and Watch and Ward professes American realism and practicality, it is not the consideration of cultural ideals that carries the tenor of the tales, but an investigation of the moral dilemma of an individual, placed by wealth or circumstances in the position to manipulate the life of another.

In Watch and Ward, Roger Lawrence, a wealthy, slightly old womanish, young man, having been greatly disappointed in love, seeks to remedy his lonely state by undertaking the rearing and education of a young orphan, Nora Lambert. Their relationship is colored from its inception by Roger's desire to make of the child a perfect and easily claimed wife. Ironically, his constant dedication to the girl, who under his care has become an original, intelligent and sensitive young woman, leaves her so grateful that she cannot view him except as one to whom she owes a profound obligation. Her unexpected delicacy and awareness causes her to feel that her position in Roger's home, after he has declared himself, is untenable and she flees from Roger and the world he had constructed for her. Eventually the two are reconciled and the novel ends with their propitious marriage.

How, if Roger's decision to patronize Nora is morally suspect, does James justify the experiment's successful outcome? Oscar Cargill is

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surely right when he identifies Roger's major flaw as "proprietorship", yet he perhaps dismisses too lightly F. W. Dupee's charge that "Roger himself is obscurely motivated by fear of life and love."[1] It is true that as we enter the novel Roger is preparing to offer himself up for the third time to the unreceptive Isabel Morton; but Cargill's charge that "declined a third time and full of the knowledge that he is no Don Juan, why should he not be timid in love?" ignores the circumstances, clearly stated by James, on which Roger has based his decision for matrimony.[2] In the first chapter we are informed that:

> Feeling at twenty-six that he had something to offer a woman, he allowed himself to become interested in Miss Morton. It was rather odd that a man of tremors and blushes should in this line have been singularly bold; for Miss Morton had the reputation of being extremely fastidious, and was supposed to wear some dozen broken hearts on her girdle, as an Indian wears the scalps of his enemies.[3]

It becomes clear that Roger's motives in the courting of Miss Morton are neither entirely "natural" nor so wholesome as Mr. Cargill would have us believe. The young man's "feelings" are not identified with an overriding emotional attachment to Isabel Morton, whom he "allows himself to become interested in," but arise with his certainty that he has something "to offer"; something with which to bargain for, or perhaps buy, a woman's devotion. Even this becomes ambiguous when it is further recognized that the likelihood of his succeeding in his suit is slight.

> She esteemed him more than any man she had known -- so she told him; but she added that the man she married must satisfy her heart. Her heart, she did not add, was bent upon a carriage and diamonds. From the point of view of ambition, a match with Roger Lawrence was not worth discussing. He was therefore dismissed with gracious but inexorable firmness. From this moment the young man's sentiment hardened into a passion. [p. 9].

That Roger has characteristics which make him fully fit for and receptive to love and admiration ("he offered himself with urgent and obstinate warmth") makes it only more obvious that for some "obscure" reason, as Dupee puts it, he is willing, perhaps even eager, to settle for something less than his true capacity allows. Roger thus emerges, for all his virtues (we are certainly meant to accept him as "an undervalued man") as a rather cold and isolated being. He is known among his acquaintances as "fastidiously neat in his person, and extremely precise and methodical in his habits, which were of the sort supposed to mark a man for bachelorhood." He seeks the one woman he is probably safe from securing, and further views possible success and ultimate failure in absolute and idealistic terms tinged with mercantile possessiveness:

> There glimmered mistily in the young man's brain a vision of a home-scene in the future -- a lamp-lit parlour on a winter night, a placid wife and mother wreathed in household smiles, a golden-haired child, and in the midst, his sentient self, drunk with possession and gratitude,
>
> * * *
>
> "Well! I shall never marry," he said. "There is something you cannot refuse me. Though I shall never possess you I may at least espouse your memory and live in intimate union with your image" [pp. Io-II].

There is something just a little unnatural, if grandeloquent about a twenty-six year old man who is eager to "espouse" the memory and "live in intimate union" with the image of his disdainful mistress. Though he suffers in his disappointment, it is rather amusing to note the haste with which he "espouses" future isolation:

> He had fancied himself prepared for the worst, but as he walked back to his hotel it seemed intolerably bitter .... He would now, he decided, cast his lot with pure reason. He had tried love and faith ... He had made a woman a goddess, and she had made him a fool. He would henceforth care neither for woman nor man, but simply for comfort, and, if need should be, for pleasure [p. 12].

This is the "discreet", "unimaginative" young man who earlier the same day had refused to lend a distaught, if unreliable, looking stranger one hundred dollars, on the grounds it would be condoning the vice which surely must have carried him to such ruin. The scene with the stranger is equally supportive of Roger's rather divided nature. He has the sensitivity to think, upon first seeing the unhappy gentleman, "What an image of fallen prosperity, of degradation and despair! I have fancied myself in trouble ... But what is my sentimental sorrow to this?" But when actually approached and made uncomfortable by the immediacy of the stranger's appeal Roger's response is ambivalent:

> Lawrence was touched, disgusted, and irritated. The man's distress was real enough, but there was something horribly disreputable in his manner [p. 6].

Roger has it in him to be generous, so long as he is not asked to share in the emotionalism of the scene. When "touched" physically as well as emotionally, he withdraws into a shell of discreet practicality. He is so aware of the "price" of a venture emotionally, as well as morally, that he cannot "patch up the stranger's misery without in some degree condoning his vice," or in other words, emotionally subsidizing an uncertain venture.

This pairing of innate warmth and habitual surface chill, while up to the commencement of the plot action apparently harmless,

becomes a serious impediment as Roger seeks to realize the deeper relationship his inner nature requires:

> Beneath simple serenity of his face , there slumbered a fund of exquisite human expression. The eye was excellent, small, perhaps, and somewhat dull, but with a certain appealing depth ... In repose Lawrence may have looked stupid; but as he talked his face slowly lightened by gradual fine degrees, until ... it inspired you with a confidence so perfect as to be in some degree a tribute to its owner's intellect, as it certainly was to his integrity[p. 4].

Roger's sin, if it may be called that, the potentially pernicious aspect of his character, is the employment of patronage disguised as philanthoropy. In doing so he denies the recipients of his largess the freedom to accept or reject his emotional claims on the basis of common humanity. The most positive aspects of his nature, his ability to love and inspire love, are in this way transformed into the fuel of obligation. Roger preserves himself in this manner from the risk of exposing his true emotional vulnerability and pride. If he had helped the stranger when his sympathy first prompted him, he would have been at the stranger's mercy. The stranger would have been in the position to define Roger's value by justifying or betraying his trust. So too, if he had succeeded in winning Isabel, based upon what he could offer her, he would not have had to accept t he responsibility should the marriage not be an unqualified success. Her opinion could cast no shadow upon the value of his deepest emotions. since they had never really been involved.

Dupee is right to the extent that Roger keeps back a portion of himself, the recognizably best portion, the portion concerned with the honest expression of love and human need. The "fear of life" which Cargill

takes complete exception to, is confirmed in the gusto with which Roger summons up and accepts a "future ... as hard and narrow as the silent street" as a substitute for "a home-scene in the future."

It is through the orphan, Nora Lambert, that Roger comes to work out the conflicts of his dual nature. Only a few hours after his rejection by Miss Morton, he awakens to the suicide shot of Nora's father, the hapless stranger. Rushing into the next room he finds himself the witness to a pitiful scene:

> Beside him stood a little girl in her nightdress, her long hair on her shoulders, shrieking and wringing her hands ... Roger overcome with horror and pity, stooped toward her and opened his arms. She conscious of nothing but the presence of human help, rushed into his embrace and buried her head in his grasp ... He felt a certain indefeasable fellowship in the sorrow of the little girl. [p. 12].

In his first moment of contact with Nora, Roger establishes and proves his capacity to establish a basic and non-obligatory relationship. This is in strong contrast to the response of the other witnesses. He sees her "born off in triumph by the proprietor's wife." It is in contrast to this woman that Roger's innate superior sensitivity becomes established:

> She was a kindly woman enough, but so thoroughly the mistress of a public house that she seemed to deal out her very pity over a bar. She exhibited toward her vividly to Roger's mind the poor child's probable portion in life [p. 13].

Yet in this very scene Roger reverts to his customary evasive response to distressful situations. Although he has reassured himself of his lack of culpability in the suicide of Nora's father, he wishes the man had accepted the ten dollars he had offered. The sequence suggests that he somehow believes he might have bought his way out of the "sickening sense of connexion with the bloodshed."

Nora, in her distress, further appeals to him as a manageable and palpable embodiment of his early domestic vision:

> ... the forlorn, precocious, potential woman ... she submitted to his consoling touch with a plaintive docility. He put his arm around her waist. The irresistable sense of her childish sweetness, of her tender feminine promise, stole softly into his pulse ... Was it the unexpungeable instinct of paternity? Was it the restless ghost of his former hope ... His promise to Miss Morton seemed still to vibrate in his heart. But there was love and love! He could be a protector, a father, a brother. What was the child before him but a tragic embodiment of the misery of isolation, a warning from his own bleak future? [p. 16].

Roger's reactions, although perhaps uncomfortably ambiguous (How much is he relying on the probable ease of gaining a waif's devotion, and to what extent is he charmed by the thought of being in a position to control her potential womanhood?) are warm and spontaneous. His concern for her embarrassment is contrasted with the "charitable" ladies, who would make an exhibition of her in the name of kindness. Still Roger retreats into the armour of discretion and professes his uneasiness about emotional speculation:

> He thought of the risk. She was an unknown quantity. Her nature, her heritage, her good and bad possibilities, were an unsolved problem. Her father had been an adventurer; what had her mother been? [p. 18].

He is goaded into adopting her by his aversion to what society would require of her in payment for its charity, as well as by his own deeply felt need for human sympathy and warmth. But the flaw of his plan is his basic need to express himself by assessable means. He is too aware of what would be the proper response for his generosity, and too eager to base the relationship upon its reasonable rewards. He does not simply

open his arms to the little girl as before; now that the relationship is to involve sustained emotional contact and evaluation, he defines his expectations in no uncertain terms:

> "Nora," he said. "you know you are quite alone. You have no home." Her lips trembled, but her eyes were fixed and fascinated. "Do you think you could love me? ... Will you come and try?"[p. 13].

The veiled cruelty of this scene is disturbing. Roger, continually dealing with irrational responses by constructive frameworks within which he can be certain of complete control, here unconsciously requires a child, orphaned under tragic and sordid circumstances, not only to admit the terrible reality that has befallen her, but having thus been stripped of all defenses, to decide if she can accept as the price of her salvation not merely gratitude, but love. The deep level at which both truly need each other is thus masked by a construct of predetermined obligation. It is at this point that Roger Lawrence establishes himself as patron and Nora as recipient of his patronage. It is at this point further that Roger begins to actively, if unknowingly, sin against both himself and the object of his love.

It is, of course, vital to recognize that Roger's failing is based firmly upon his potential for right action. In taking Nora in, in bringing her to his country home, in seeking to relieve her of her shadowed past, in leaving the exact relationship undefined, in attempting to provide her with the best possible education; in all this Roger is motivated by genuine generosity and devotion. But it rapidly becomes clear that, having retained a clear consciousness of the terms of his experiment, Roger has

tainted his chosen source of joy. Nora becomes his life, and in doing so loses her independent identity for him. He sees her continually and solely in relation to himself. He becomes, in fact, though fair and generous, a sort of vampire, drawing his being from the active definition of hers. That she is a child and in need of guidance would seem to mitigate his offense greatly; however a careful reading of his attitude toward her reveals the extent to which his mind is fixed upon personal remuneration.

She is removed to the country, not to benefit from its open structure, but to avoid a society which had pronounced her "a fright Likewise Roger fears his cousin Herbert's visit because "Nora bore rather livelier testimony to his charity than to his taste." Roger does not wish to "remind his young companion of what she owed him," which suggests that it is very clear and present to him. He has his own ideas on how to get her to a similar understanding: "It was the very keystone of his plan that their relations should ripen into a perfect matter of course ... Until he had detected in her glance and tone the note of passionate tenderness his experiment must have failed."

In accord with his certainty of an eventual declaration on Nora's part, he "does not claim in the child the prosaic right of property which belongs to the paternal name." The trick to this is that by leaving the "precise definition of his rights" open, he allows to expand infinitely whatever obligation might have been defined by a paternal relationship. Nora is destined not only to feel daughterly devotion to Roger, but sisterly and eventually romantic passion. Roger is, under the

pretense of leaving her free to chose her own limits, preparing the way for an incredible exfoliation of required roles.

In these areas his manipulation, though effective, is largely passive. In others he enters as a more active agent:

> He strove to conceal the past from her childish sense by a great pictorial screen of present joys and comforts. He wished her life to date from the moment he had taken her home. He had taken her for better, for worse; but he longed to quench all baser chance in the daylight of actual security ... Meanwhile as he cunningly devised her happiness, his own seemed securely established [p. 22].

He even goes so far as becoming upset at the thought she might have retained a separate store of memories; and is, in fact, thus denied by Roger any particle of independent existence:

> He determined to drive in the first nail with his own hands, to lay the smooth foundations of Nora's culture, to teach her to read and write and cipher, to associate himself largely with the growth of her primal sense of things [p. 25].

It is by now apparent that the consequence of taking the orphan into his home is that Roger practices almost total manipulation of her life, education and prospects. Yet Roger is not a monster. He acts consistently, and sometimes selflessly, in seeing that Nora has every opportunity. He sends her to the best school he can find, although he dislikes the separation. Roger's major failing is his inability to enter imaginatively into what Nora must be experiencing. He can wonder, but his imagination is mostly reserved for projecting his own vision of Nora in the future. He writes Mrs. Isabel Keith, <u>née</u> Morton:

> You know that, two years ago, I adopted a homeless little girl. One of these days she will be a lovely woman. I mean to do what I can to make her one. Perhaps, six years hence she will be greatful enough not to refuse me as you did. Pray for me more than ever. I have begun at the beginning; it will be my own fault if I have not a perfect wife [p. 34].

Roger, having established himself in the young girl's life, continues in his practice of preserving his innermost emotions by claiming a duty of gratitude, instead of a natural claim of affection.

When he finds that a sense of obligation is growing with Nora, Roger is tempted to take advantage of the situation by suggesting the exact course her repayment might take. However delicacy and the assurance that she cannot have any alternate dreams unknown to him, prevent him. To his amazement and consternation Nora proceeds to reveal a very acute sense of her past and the obligation she owes him for her present. He is made aware for the first time "what her silence must have cost her."

It is from this moment that the tide of Roger's possessiveness begins to ebb. He comes to an awareness that the absolute power which would enable him to control the situation must be based in obligation, and that, if he would be loved for himself he must risk not being loved at all. In short he begins to make a clear distinction between what he desires for himself and what is best for Nora:

> "If I were only a good old Catholic, that I might shut her up in a convent and keep her childish and stupid and contented!" Roger felt that he was too doggedly consciencious; but abuse his conscience as he would he could not make it yield an inch; so that in the constant strife between his egotistical purpose and his generous temper, the latter kept gaining ground[ p. 43].

Two other characters begin to figure prominently: Nora's cousin, George Fenton, and Roger's cousin, Hubert Lawrence. Both appear as Roger's rivals in love and patronage for Nora; and both represent possible variants on patronage as the basis of personal relationships. It is by his handling of these characters, and their contrast with Roger, that James elucidates his theme.

After Roger has declared his love for Nora she turns to each of these men as possible means of temporary refuge. Why does she do this? Each man has in some manner offered her his advice and protection. It is interesting to note the histories of their concern.

George Fenton first appears a slightly vulgar Westerner, interested in Nora, but perhaps equally so in the comfortable situation he has found her in. His easy familiarity and claim to familial devotion impress Nora very much but annoy Roger, who believes him to be shady and mercenary. When, prior to Fenton's departure, Roger comes upon him wheedling money out of the guiless Nora, the guardian seeks to degrade the man in his ward's eyes by offering him his own patronage. The results are nearly disasterous. By exposing the implied ignonimy of accepting patronage, Fenton reveals the supreme littleness of Roger, and threatens Roger's relationship with Nora, since if he now seeks to claim Nora on the grounds of obligation, he will in actuality be offering her an insult:

> Roger stood staring, with his proffered gift. "You decline?" he cried, almost defiantly.
>
> "Decline is not the word. A man does not decline an insult."
>
> Was Fenton, then, to have the best of it, and was his own generosity to be turned against him? Blindly, passionately, Roger crumpled the notes into his fist and tossed them into the fire ... As the notes disappeared Nora's eyes sought Roger's face. He looked at her stupidly, and then turning on his heel walked out of the room [p. 75].

Fenton then wins the first round by appearing to be above patronage. He appears to Nora as a man capable of independent action and triumphant over manipulation. His letter from New York continues to give this impression as well as implying that for no reason other than kinship

he would be glad to care for Nora. However when Nora flees to him she is impressed and horrified by the degree to which he is dependent upon and easily manipulated by money. Knowing that Roger will come to look for her Fenton determines to sell the information, and even for a moment contemplates holding her for ransom. Nora flees from him and seeks the protection of the urbane Hubert Lawrence.

Hubert has made clear his position, unknown to Nora, early in the novel, when appealed to by Roger to give his opinion of the child Nora:

> He found it hard, however, to induce him to consider her seriously. Hubert's observation was exercised rather less in the interest of general truth than of particular profit; and of what profit to Hubert was Nora's shambling childhood? [p. 31].

When Nora matures, however, Hubert is quite willing to assess her worth. He flirts and flatters her, although it later comes out that he has been engaged throughout the entire affair. Nora, in her innocence, is easily taken in by his good looks and urbane manner; however even she is aware that Hubert is getting something more than the pleasure of her conversation for his attention:

> Hubert was so frank and friendly, so tenderly and gallantly patronising, that more than once she felt herself beginning to expand; but then, suddenly something absent in the tone of his assent, a vague fancy that, in the gathering dusk, he was looking at her all at his ease, rather than listening to her converted her bravery into what she knew to be deplorable little-girlishness [p. 30].

When she turns to him after her disappointment with Fenton, his gallantry evaporates and he is "relieved" at the thought that he can pay her off.

Hurbert and Fenton both come to represent in their relationship with Nora, the self-centered motives of patronage, which allow no emotional bond between the patron and his protege. Nora's experiences reveal that neither the mercenary Fenton, nor the sensualist Hubert are interested in her and her welfare except as it directly affects their own needs. Roger differs from them in his total emotional committment to his ward. It is their affection which finally allows him to recognize Nora's independent worth.

When he learns that she has gone to Hubert he relinquishes all claim and hopes that she will be happy. He gives her up, but he does not pretend that she has acted ungratefully. And she in leaving him and exposing the emptiness of the men whose images had obscured his real worth finds a new freedom from obligation:

> She stood there on the pavement, strangely almost absurdly, free and light of spirit. She knew neither whither she should turn nor what she should do, yet the fears which had haunted her for a whole day and night had vanished ... she was in the secret of the universe, and the secret of the universe was, that Roger was the only man in it who had a heart [p. 95].

Roger goes after Nora because he has "a heart." When he finds her he makes no attempt to claim her, he asks only "Where are you going?" He has learned to respect the integrity of the individual, and Nora has learned to value his great ability for unselfish love. They come together in the end because each has learned to recognize and overcome the distortions and restrictions that are imposed by the atmosphere of patronage.

The relationship between guardian and ward in <u>Watch and Ward</u> foreshadows that between Roderick and his patron, Rowland Mallet, in

Roderick Hudson. At its most superficial level Roderick Hudson is the tale of a gifted artist and his precipitous creative and moral decline in the vital but corrupting culture of Europe. However it is not the sculptor, Roderick, but his friend and patron, Mallet who provides the novel with a cohesive and subtle intelligence. James himself, in his preface, identifies the character of Rowland not merely as a narrative vehicle, but as the central concern of the novel:

> The centre of interest throughout Roderick is in Rowland Mallet's consciousness, and the drama is the very drama of that consciousness ... Discernible from the first the joy of such a "job" as this making of his relation to everything involved a sufficiently limited, a sufficiently pathetic, tragic, comic, ironic, personal state to be thoroughly natural, and yet at the same time a sufficiently clear medium to represent a whole. This whole was to be the sum of what "happened" to him, or in other words his total adventure; but as what happened to him was above all to feel certain things happening to others, to Roderick, to Christina, to Mary Garland, to Mrs. Hudson, to the Cavaliere, to the Prince, so the beauty of the constructional game was to preserve in everything its especial value for him.[4]

James' intention that Roderick Hudson should represent "a whole" demands a certain reliability in Rowland's perceptions; but in seeking to convey the "personal" and "limited" aspects of Rowland's consciousness he also provided the central character and principle motive of the drama's action. Rowland, not Roderick, is the instigator, the principal, and the measure of the narrative. His relation to those in the novel who are the source of his involvement thus becomes of prime importance and is inextricably connected with his role as patron.

James goes to rather excessive lengths to provide a background which presents Rowland's patronage of Roderick as an action resulting from, and consistent with, a psychological need. Rowland himself, in the opening

chapter, admits to his cousin, Cecilia, that he feels the need but lacks the ability to express himself creatively:

> Do you know I sometimes think that I'm a man of genius half-finished? The genius has been left out, the faculty of expression is wanting; but the need for expression remains, and I spend my days groping for the latch of a closed door.[5]

James makes clear that Rowland's desire to in some way contribute to the arts is not pure philanthropy, but a personal need to complete his innately limited genius. He dismisses his cousin's suggestion that he contribute to some deserving charity for the reason that: "Useful though it might be, it expressed too imperfectly the young man's own personal conception of usefulness ... It seemed to him that the glow of happiness must be found ... in producing a masterpiece in one of the arts." Rowland is thus motivated by a complex set of needs; his own self awareness, his incomplete genius and his desire to fulfill or express himself through art.

Rowland's scheme to purchase art masterpieces in Europe and present them to an American museum is one means of expressing the aesthetic element of his temper; but one which falls short of the involvement he desires.

As it was, he could only buy pictures and not paint them. His Puritain ancestry, his emotionally deprived childhood under a cold father and a cowed mother, his sensitivity and "incorruptable modesty", create in combination a deep and irreconcilable conflict in his nature:

> He had frequent fits of melancholy in which he declared that he was neither fish nor flesh nor good red herring. His was neither an irresponsibly contemplative nature nor a sturdily practical one, and he was forever looking in vain for the uses of things that please and the charm of things that sustain. He was an awkward mixture of moral and aesthetic curiosity, and yet he would have made an ineffective reformer and an indifferent artist. p. 14 .

At the time of his visit to his cousin Rowland is ripe for the appeal of some grander and more immediate program. Cecilia provides the perfect lure in her description of her young friend, the sculptor Roderick Hudson. After meeting the young man and ascertaining his talent, Rowland comes to the portentous realization that Roderick, possessed of the gifts whose lack mars Rowland's life, wants precisely those things which Rowland is equipped to provide: money and exposure to the artistic riches of Europe. Rowland extends his patronage to the young artist with the recognition that through it he may become the means, if not the origin, of cultural enrichment.

In her book The Early Development of Henry James, C. P. Kelly notes that Rowland and Roderick may be seen as two aspects of James' creative whole:

> In Roderick is the artistic temperament without the power to realize itself in production; in Rowland is the power, the will to do, coupled with the financial means and regard for others, but without the inborn ability ... Man is a dual nature ... To be successful, both sides must come to some sort of an inner agreement, both sides must cooperate ...[5]

Roderick Hudson does consider the dynamics of such an achievement, but from the point of view of a single human consciousness; it was not James' intention to draw his characters as the personification of an abstract allegory on the creative process. Rowland Mallet's experiment fails, and it is the "especial value for him" of this failure which is the purose of the narrative.

Rowland, by patronizing Roderick, is actively seeking to complete himself; but unlike his earlier plan to purchase art, Rowland is now unconsciously seeking to invade and lay claim to for his own benefit another human's consciousness and in doing so assumes the responsibility for not only the fate of that one individual, Roderick Hudson, but for all whose lives will be affected by his influence over Roderick. Rowland is not entirely unaware of the implication of his act:

> ... when he reflected that he was really meddling with the simple stillness of this small New England home and that he had ventured to disturb so much living security in the interest of a faraway fantastic hypothesis, he gasped, amazed at his temerity ... There stirred in his mind an odd feeling of annoyance with Roderick for having so peremptorily taken possession of his nature [p. 58].

Even in his invitation to Roderick to accompany him to Rome, he attempts to put the burden of responsibility off his own shoulders:

> "Allow me to explain," said Rowland. "I believe in you if you're prepared to work and to wait and to struggle and to exercise a great many virtues. And then I'm afraid to say it, to force it upon you, lest I should disturb you more than I should help you. You must decide for yourself. I simply offer you an opportunity." [p. 31].

Rowland's patronage differs from the concern and influence exercised by the immediate members of the Hudson household in that while their interest is based upon an acknowledged bond of love and kinship, Rowland's is based on the objective assessment of Roderick's talent:

> "We've had hopes for Mr. Roderick, but I confess that if I've rightly understood them they stopped short of towering eminence. We shouldn't have taken the responsibility of entertaining <u>that</u> idea for him." [p. 49].

Rowland's conscious intentions are of the best order; he wants simply to help what he suspects is a very talented artist to achieve his

full creative potential. However, by subordinating Roderick's whole nature to his role as representative of the creative temper, Rowland can dismiss the question of his generosity's affect on the unstable young man. The potential for tragedy and failure does not seem to him on the same level as the promise of contributing to the arts.

> "When it first occurred to me that I might start our young friend on the path of glory I felt as if I had an unimpeachable inspiration. Then I remembered there were dangers and difficulties, and I asked myself whether I had a right to drag him out of his obscurity. My notion of his really having the great gift answered the question. He is made to do the things that we are the better for having. I can't do such things myself, but when I see a young man of genius standing helpless and hopeless for want of capital, I feel -- and its no affectation of humility, I assure you -- as if it would give at least a reflected usefulness to my own life to offer him his opportunity ... "
>
> "It seems to me that we have the right to ask more -- to demand that you quarentee us not only the development of the artist but the security of the man."
>
> Rowland became grave again. "His security?"
>
> "His moral, his sentimental security. Here you see, all that's perfect. We are all under a tacit compact to keep him quiet ... "[p. 42].

It is precisely this "moral" security that Rowland cannot guarantee. Roderick's experiences in Rome, from his initial creative outburst, to his sudden burning out, to his dissipation and fruitless fascination with Christina Light, indicate Rowland's helplessness in controlling the consequences of his original act of interference. Gradually the implications of this act spread like concentric ripples in a pool. The selection of Rowland as the central consciousness "experiencing" the drama of its response to "certain things happening to others", makes perfect sense when it realized that what "happens" to those others is the ultimate result of that consciousness' attempt to impress its design upon one of the "others."

Roderick, excited by the prospect of journeying to Europe, proposes to his cousin, Mary Garland, the one woman, perhaps the one person, to whom Rowland felt he might have been able to commit himself. This rash act has its own tragic repercussions: It isolates Mary, for whom Roderick feels no real passion, and leaves her unable to act in her own best interest in seeking a more suitable match; it stunts the growth of Rowland's potential for emotional commitment, forcing him to hide his best feelings from both Roderick and Mary; and it leads ultimately to Roderick's own death when stunned by Rowland's confession of love for the woman he has discarded and overcome by the realization of his own egotistical and unfeeling conduct towards her, he falls or leaps to his death from an Alpine precipice.

The gradual growth of Rowland's moral consciousness in response to the actions of those around him is somewhat analogous to Roger Lawrence', in Watch and Ward, but even more in it prefigures the tragic yet triumphant awareness that comes to Isabel Archer in Portrait of a Lady. During the opening chapters of the novel, Rowland's character is totally defined by his awareness of Roderick's promise and artistic successes. He notes Roderick's synthesizing genius, his unconventional but arresting social manners, his unconscious mannerisms and undeveloped but expressive voice. He is secure in his faith in the "health of the sincere imagination." Then gradually, as Roderick loses his impetus and comes to realize what this experiment may cost him should he prove incapable of continuing in his meteoric climb, Rowland becomes aware of the distasteful side of what he has sought to do: Rowland, despite his

responsibility for the story's tragedy is yet the one character most able to benefit from his experiences because he possesses the power to enter imaginitively into affairs unrealted to his own desires.

This ability to detatch himself from the purely subjective view, the view which allows Roderick his great spontaneity, allows Rowland to slowly piece together the whole of what has happened and understand his own relation to it. As he does this he comes to a realization at once tragic and liberating. A realization which is reinforced by, and which to some extent justifies, the melodrama of Roderick's death. For it is, as Mr. Poirier suggests, "what happens to Rowland in life that is more important than Roderick's death."[7]

Roderick's death is the catalyst which forces Rowland to the final confrontations and evaluation of his actions. He sees that Roderick, although a man of considerable talent, cannot be "made" into a genius. He lacks the strength of character necessary to endure the frustration of his art and seeks instead to justify his failure through claiming a super human sensitivity to his sufferings. His actions become entirely divorced from any consideration other than himself. He grows more and more self absorbed and destructive. Aware only of his own emptiness he continues to let Mary, to whom he is entirely indifferent, devote herself to him because the sound of her voice is soothing. Rowland, during their last meeting, recognizes the blindness and sterility of such self-centeredness:

> It was egotism always -- the shock of taste, the humiliation of a proved blunder, the sense, above all, of a flagrant want of grace; but never a hint of simple sorrow for pain inflicted [p. 451].

This realization, shortly before Roderick's death, indicates Rowland's growing awareness of the danger of valuing a person for what they can achieve, rather than what they actually are. By evaluating Roderick entirely through his artistic talent, Rowland fails to anticipate the possible consequences of his patronage on Roderick's character. Although Rowland has exhibited great patience with the temperamental artist, it is not until he recognizes Roderick's complex and imperfect humanity that he develops real compassion for him as an individual.

The discovery of Roderick's broken body at the foot of the trail forces Rowland to make a final empathetic identification with the dead man:

> He watched in the flesh for seven long hours, but the vigil of his spirit was a thing that would never cease. The most rational of men wandered and lost himself in the dark places of passion, lashed his "conduct" with a scourage of steel, accusing it of cruelty and injustice ... Roderick had been fond of saying that there are such things as necessary follies, and he, of all men, was now proving it. The great gaunt wicked cliff above them became almost company to him, as the chance-saved photograph of a murderer might become for a shipwrecked castaway a link with civilization: It had but done <u>its</u> part too, and what were they both, in their stupidity, he and it, but dumb agents of fate? He tried at any rate to understand what had hideously happened ... He had attempted to descend the cliff in the treacherous gloom, he had made the inevitable slip... Even if it had not been far, it had been far enough. Now that all was over Rowland understood how up to the brim, for two years, his personal world had been filled. It looked to him at present as void and blank and sinister as a theatre bankrupt and closed [p. 461].

Rowland, struggling to resolve his own guilt in Roderick's tragedy, seeks first an inhuman absolution. He identifies himself with the impersonal "dumb forces of nature and fate." But his imaginative tracing of Roderick's descent is also a journey into understanding and the acceptance of guilt. Even though his actions were directed toward a good

end, his influence in Roderick's life had been enough "to percipitate the young man's downfall. And further his own role had been that of the receiver, the audience. It was he, not Roderick, who had gained by his act of generosity. Without Roderick to maintain the illusion of Rowland's involvement he was "blank", "sinister", "void" and "bankrupt."

Mary's response to Roderick's death gives Rowland the opportunity, however barren and sterile, to affirm his recognition of the lesson of tragedy:

> Mrs. Hudson tottered forward with outstretched hands ... but before she reached her son Mary Garland had rushed past her and, in the face of the staring, pitying, awestruck crowd, had flung herself, with the magnificent movement of one whose rights were supreme and with a loud tremendous cry, upon the senseless vestige of all she had cherished.
>
> That cry still lives in Rowland's ears. It interposes persistently against the consciousness that when he sometimes -- very rarely -- sees her, she is inscrutably civil to him: against the reflexion that during the awful journey back to America, made of course with his assistance, she had used him, with the last rigour of consistence, as a character definitely appointed to her use. [p. 452].

Mary recognizes Rowland's guilt both in Roderick's tragedy and her own. Rowland accepts her judgment and thus accepts the revelation of his part, however unintentional, in her tragedy and the destruction of Roderick. It is only by accepting, and continuing to participate in the consequences of his actions that Rowland can hope to transcend them.

This is the reason for his continued visits to the unreceptive Mary and disgruntled Cecilia. His patience is not that of a lover petitioning for acceptance, but that of a penitent working out his salvation. Mary in her cold civility and isolation is proof of the unanticipated influence of his actions on others. Cecilia by talking with him of Roderick also keeps

in mind the wonder of the individual his presumptive act helped to destroy. Rowland's renunciation of a normal life in order to preserve the memory of Roderick, although tragic in itself, is proof that he has come to a full awareness of the moral folly and guilt attached to the manipulation of another person.

In Roderick Hudson James created his first novel of consciousness where the hero was not granted an authorial pardon, but left to find triumph in the complete acceptance and understanding of the consequences of his actions. Rowland Mallet's inability to make a complete break with or restitution for the results of his manipulative interference in the lives of others results in a grim closing, but one which carries the germs of Jamesian morality as it comes to define itself in his later works.

## The Portrait of a Lady

Henry James achieved his first undisputed masterpiece in 1881 with the publication of The Portrait of a Lady. James himself appraised it "a structure reared with an 'architectural' competence .. that makes it, to the author's own sense, the most proportioned of his productions after The Ambassadors."[1] Yet it is not mere "'architectural competence" which makes The Portrait the artistic culmination of James' early period. Within it James for the first time gained mastery over the multiplicity of themes which had figured most positively in his previous works, but which were not until then incorporated within a single work, "entire and of certain magnitude."[2]

The complexity of fictional representation -- in the variety of characterization, the interrelation of themes and the profundity of their treatment -- resulted in a work of such uniform destiny, such "roundness", as James termed it, that to attempt to disengage any single theme and follow its thread unbroken through the entire work, without regard for other aspects of James' intent would be negligent. Therefore, when considering the role of patronage in The Portrait of a Lady, it becomes necessary to recognize its relation to the novel's other concerns.

The dichotomy between the New World and the Old, so patent in Roderick Hudson, where the slant is rather against European culture, at least morally, but recognizable even in Nora Lambert's sketchy but beneficial journey to Rome in Watch and Ward, appears with greater

cogency and consideration in The Portrait. Isabel Archer's initiation into the subtleties and refinements of European society through the agency of the Touchett family, particularly her invalid cousin, the doomed ~~but~~ cosmopolitan, Ralph Touchett, becomes the clearest statement of James' use of the American in Europe as a symbol for the conflicting virtues of innocence and experience.

This conflict, particularly as it manifests itself in the awareness of a sensitive consciousness, is closely linked in James with the act of patronage. In Watch and Ward Nora is able to appreciate the humanity of her patron only after experiencing the full consequences of his act in relation to the broader world. Just so, in Roderick Hudson, Rowland's providing Roderick with the opportunity to prove his full artistic capacity, although the consequences are pathetic in many ways, brings Rowland ultimately to a higher understanding of his own nature and its relation to those around him. In The Portrait of a Lady it is Isabel's tragic coming to self-awareness through the opportunities created by Ralph's patronage that gives the drama its moral definition.

Death and the meaning of death for those who remain, is made a richer aspect of the later novel. In Watch and Ward, Roger gains stature for Nora as he almost loses his life to a fever contracted while she experienced her initial maturing in Rome. In Roderick Hudson the title character actually dies and his death becomes the determining factor in the life and "spiritual" awakening of his friend and patron, Rowland. In The Portrait, Ralph's deathbed scene becomes the pivot for connecting the novel's early action and Isabel's final stand, which

otherwise seems somewhat contradictory.

James saw as the center of his work, thematically as well as structurally, the character of a young, intelligent, American woman, Isabel Archer, exposed to a myriad of events that finally illuminate for her a rare truth of human existence:

> Place the centre of the subject in the young woman's own consciousness ... and you get as interesting and as beautiful a difficulty as you could wish. Stick to that -- for the centre; put the heaviest weight into that scale, which will be so largely the scale of her relation to herself. Make her only interested enough, at the same time, in the things that are not herself, and this relation needn't fear to be too limited. Place meanwhile in the other scale the lighter weight (which is usually the one that tips the balance of interest): press least hard, in short on the consciousness of your heroine's satellites, especially the male; make it an interest contributive only to the greater one. See, at all events, what can be done in this way ... The girl hovers, inextinguishable, as a charming creature, and the job will be to translate her into the highest terms of that formula, and as nearly as possible moreover into all of them.[3]

One result of this technique is that Isabel is free of the stilted dialogue and melodramatic gestures that marred the character of Roderick Hudson. Nevertheless the relationship between Roderick and Rowland is essentially parallel to that of Isabel and Ralph. Even more similar is that which existed between Nora and Roger in Watch and Ward. Common to Roger, Rowland, and Ralph is the character of the detatched, even alienated, individual of means, willing to devote his wealth to the improvement of some third, and often more promising, party.

James decision to weigh the "balance of interest" away from the concerned "satellites" of The Portrait leaves Ralph Touchett a less central figure than the earlier patrons, Roger and Rowland, who functioned

as James' center of consciousness in the preceding novels. As Isabel, the object of patronage, gains independent stature, the importance of the relationship between two fully developed and complex characters surpasses that possible with the more negligible Nora and Roderick. Ralph possesses such charm, despite his secondary role, that it is indicative of James' skill in carrying out the scheme of Isabel's centrality that Ralph, for all his attributes of the Jamesian hero, remains secondary to his cousin.

James's skill in delineating the complexity of Isabel's nature, however, answers the challenge given her by Ralph. The reader is early made aware of the equivocal nature of the young woman's temperament. That this is to be a basic factor in any assessment of her throughout the story is indicated in several ways. A hereditary disposition is suggested through the humorous but slightly ominous description of her father with his "general willingness to take leave of a world in which the difficulty of doing as one liked appeared to increase as one grew older." This suggests the origin of Isabel's individualistic dedication to the concept of total personal freedom and her innate attraction to death as the deliveror from the world's restrictions. Isabel's own inability to achieve peace with reality is suggested in the description of the bolted door:

> The place owed much of its mysterious melancholy to the fact that it was properly entered from the second door of the house, the door that had been condemned, and that was fastened by bolts which a particularly slender little girl found it impossible to slide. She knew that this silent, motionless portal opened into the street; if the slide-lights had not been filled with green paper, she might have looked out upon the little brown stoop and the well-worn brick pavement. But she had no wish to look out, for this would have interfered with her theory that there was a strange, unseen place on the other side ... [p. 23].[4]

This description of Isabel as a child provides through its imagery an insight into her downfall as an adult. Her tragic preference for Osmond into whose life of cultured obscurity she can project her private vision of the ideal, over either the socially defined Lord Warburton or the sexually forceful Caspar Goodwood, is foreshadowed in her childhood refusal to look beyond the open shades to a street whose reality, like that of Gilbert Osmond, is faintly sordid. In her childhood home, Isabel is safe in her willful preference for the "theoretical." However it soon becomes clear that this decision to see things divorced from their mundane aspects is one which she is prepared to carry as far as opportunity allows:

> It may be affirmed ... that Isabel ... was in the habit of taking for granted, on scanty evidence, that she was right ... Meanwhile her thoughts were a tangle of vague outlines, which had never been corrected by the judgment of people who seemed to her to speak with authority ... The girl had a certain nobleness of imagination which rendered her a good many services and played her a good many tricks. She spent half her time in thinking of beauty, and bravery, and magnanimity; she had a fixed determination to regard the world as a place of brightness, of free expression, of irresistable action ... It was one of her theories that Isabel Archer was very fortunate in being independent, and that she ought to make some very enlightened use of her independence [pp. 47-8].

Isabel rises above James' detached and ironic commentary by virtue of her courage and inexperience. That life in Albany has been unable to daunt her faith in the life of the ideal indicates only that, as Mrs. Touchett says, Isabel's potential is larger than the scope offered by her American background:

> I found her in an old house at Albany, sitting in a dreary room on a rainy day, reading a heavy book, and boring herself to death. She didn't know she was bored,

> but when I told her, she seemed very greatful for the hint. You may say I shouldn't have told her -- I should have let her alone. There is a good deal in that; but I acted conscientiously; I thought she was meant for something better. It occurred to me that it would be a kindness to take her about and introduce her to the world. She thinks she knows a great deal of it -- like most American girls; but like most American girls she is very much mistaken [p. 40].

However dubious Mrs. Touchett's sense of conscientiousness, James seems to imply that Isabel's innocent egoism, high moral courage, and insistence upon the practicality of her abstract ideals are the artless qualities that give Americans, unrestricted by European reverence for proportion and form, the aura of unlimited potential.

Between these two worlds James places a community of potential synthesis; Gardencourt, the English home of the American Touchetts. Because of their intermediary position the Touchetts are able to appreciate both Isabel's unstudied enthusiasms and the discipline that results from a rich variety of experiences, the formative benefits of European society. Gardencourt seems to promise a paradisiac merging of the two cultures, but even here are felt life's limitations, in the form of death and disease. Mr. Touchett, having built the base for the blending of the best of two worlds, is in the last stages of an illness that takes him shortly after Isabel's arrival. His son, Ralph, with all the benefits of his father's activity, is prevented from completing the synthesis by his own ill health. Into this world of dying energies and brave intelligence Isabel moves and becomes the catalyst of her own fate. Ralph, sensitive to his own withered promise and Isabel's unclouded energy, is entranced and unable to resist the temptation to make it possible for her to accomplish what he cannot. His activity in this regard, both

in insuring her financial independence through his father's will, and in assuming the role of devoted adviser, makes him, next to Isabel herself, the most interesting and complex character in the novel.

Ralph Touchett becomes irrevocably linked with Isabel and her fate in a manner exceeding that of her family, suitors, friends and husband. He alone is able to both appreciate, finally understand and still love his American cousin. His decision to provide her with the means of expanding her experience is based not simply on a parasitic desire to feed off her capacity for life, but in a generous misapprehension of her character. He is not alone in his erroneous evaluation: Isabel herself truly believes in her capacity to meet any situation and emerge with her integrity and happiness intact:

> Her life should always be in harmony with the most pleasant impression she should produce; she would be what she appeared, and she would appear what she was. Sometimes she went so far as to wish that she should find herself some day in a difficult position, so that she might have the pleasure of being as heroic as the occasion demanded [p. 48].

The quality of the response she inspires, if not its validity, is also significant: Ralph's decision to back her naive ideal of total independence as the means of gaining "impressions" of life is an act of faith inconsistent with his pose of worldly stoicism.

James' portrayal of Ralph's character is almost as comprehensive as that of Isabel's. Beginning with his broad experiences as a young man in England and America, his academic promise, his admiration for the best in his father's character, his travels, and his decision to work under his father in a bank, James is quick to point to the determining incident in Ralph's character as it manifests itself in the plot's action:

> He had caught a violent cold, which fixed itself upon his lungs ... He had to give up work and embrace the sorry occupation known as taking care of one's self. At first he was disgusted ... A certain fund of indolence that he possessed came to his aid and helped to reconcile him to doing nothing; for at best he was too ill for anything but a passive life. As he said to himself, there was really nothing he had wanted very much to do, so that he had given up nothing ... the perfume of forbidden fruit seemed occasionally to ... remind him that the finest pleasures of life are to be found in the world of action, however ... With the prospect of losing them, the simple use of his faculties became an exquisite pleasure; it seemed to him that the delights of observation had never been suspected ... It was very probably this sweet-tasting property of observation ... that was mainly concerned in Ralph's quickly stirred interest in the arrival of a young lady who was evidently not insipid [p. 37].

Unlike James' previous patrons, Ralph is spared the onus of an innate and inexplicable detatchment from "the world of action"; he is given the excuse of illness, in which case his attitude bespeaks a certain tough adaptability. With his sensitivity and intelligence thus forbidden full play by an incident beyond his control, instead of by over-fastidiousness, Ralph's folly becomes more sympathetic and acceptable.

His folly, however, exists and leaves its mark upon others. In speaking with his mother he repeatedly inquires what she intends "to do" with Isabel. His mother's response is the first clue to the moral danger Ralph is entering with his "interest" in Isabel: "Do with her? You talk as if she were a yard of calico. I shall do absolutely nothing with her, and she herself will do everything that she chooses." Later, having decided against any emotional involvement, of the romantic variety, with Isabel, Ralph thinks of her in terms of entertainment and art: Some of the very qualities he appreciates in her, her liveliness and self-confidence, so interest him as a connoisseur of observation that he loses awareness

of her relation to him as a fellow human:

> This view of Isabel as "nothing more than entertainment .. although entertainment of a high order ... finer ... than a Greek bas-relief, than a great Titian, than a Gothic cathedral makes Ralph for sometime blind to Isabel's basic humanity and capacity for error[p. 59].

It is this excessive desire to witness the consequences of Isabel's originality, although understandable and even admirable in its compliment to Isabel's "nature," that makes Ralph willing to act in a manner that forces Isabel to act out her drama during his lifetime. He himself gives Isabel the rationale for his interference when she questions his interest in her relationship with his friend, Lord Warburton. It consists of a selfish recitation of what life has denied him and a claim upon her life as recompense:

> Of course you mean that I am meddling in what doesn't concern me. But why shouldn't I ... ? What's the use of being your cousin, if I can't have a few privileges? What is the use of adoring you without the hope of a reward, if I can't have a few compensations? What's the use of being ill and disabled, and restricted to mere spectatorship at the game of life, if I can't really see the show when I have paid so much for the tickets?[p. 137].

Witty as this defense is, it suggests Ralph's unwillingness to recognize the influence of his action upon any life other than his own.

The discussion between Ralph and his father at the drawing up of Mr. Touchett's will further exemplifies Ralph's blindness to Isabel's imperfect, and therefore potentially tragic, humanity when it is in conflict with his idealized vision of her potential:

> Ralph leaned back in his chair ... "I take a great interest in my cousin," he said ... I shall not live many years; but I hope I shall live long enough to see what she does with herself. She is entirely independent of me; I can exercise very little influence upon her life. But I should like to put it into her power to do some of the things she wants. She wants to see the world, for instance. I should like to put money in her purse ... I should like to see her going before the breeze."
>
> "You speak as if it were for your entertainment ... I don't think I enter into your spirit. It seems to me immoral ... I don't know that it is right to make everything so easy for a person."
>
> "It surely depends upon the person. When the person is good, your making things easy is all to the credit of virtue. To facilitate the execution of good impulses, what can be a nobler act? ...
>
> "Tell me this first. Doesn't it occur to you that a young lady with sixty thousand pounds may fall victim to the fortune-hunters?" ...
>
> "Decidedly. That's a risk, and it has entered into my calculations. I think it appreciable, but I think it's small, and I am prepared to take it ... "
>
> " ... I shall get just the good that I said just now I wished to put into Isabel's reach -- that of having gratified my imagination" [p. 170].

There are several vital points that emerge through this conversation in relation to James' vision of patronage. First James' presentation of the patron as one who seeks to gain emotional compensation by causing another to do what he cannot, is distinct from his presentation of the truly charitable. Such a figure of true charity is Mr. Touchett, who leaves money to Isabel simply as a concrete representation of his affection for her. In contrast, Ralph's desire to augment that amount proceeds from a desire to exert an influence over her whose results will be conditions as beneficial to him as they will to her.

Ralph's theory that Isabel is "as good as her best opportunities," is another and equally fallacious version of Rowland's belief, in

Roderick Hudson, in the "health of the great imagination." Both are the result of minds that have, for their own reasons, found it attractive to "fix" another person's character in the service of some personal ideal. Such an attitude causes the patrons to dehumanize his object even as he seeks to make certain of its superiority.

Also, both Ralph and Rowland behave as if, by assuming responsibility for the consequences of their action in advance, they have somehow delivered the whole enterprise from the accusation of irresponsible meddling. Ralph may have accepted the responsibility for Isabel's fate at the hands of the impoverished aesthete, Osmond, but it is questionable whether, ignorant as he was of the full spectrum of its consequence he was acting responsibly. Not only was Isabel ignorant, and therefore incapable of agreeing to his plan, but his facile and presumptuous excuse of his behavior on the basis that he would accept the responsibility for it, in no way diminishes the actual suffering of the people involved. Had his actions been of consequence only to himself, it would have been a different matter. But they are not merely incidentally, but primarily of significance to others.

Ralph's realization of his mistake in taking a presuming hand in the course of another human's life comes in stages. Isabel's actions, and her own realization of the awesomely broad consequences of them, seen and gradually understood by the now interested observer, Ralph, become the center of the novel and bring both characters closer together as they slowly and painfully achieve the same realization of man's inability to remain in constant and knowing control of his life. It is in

their meetings and conversations, seen against the actions that precede and follow them, that James brings into perspective the implications of their drama.

An early and significant conversation occurs when Isabel, overcome by her sudden wealth, seeks Ralph's advice and he learns, somewhat to his alarm, that she is not quite so certain of herself and her goal as he had thought. Earlier, after her refusal of Lord Warburton, Isabel had repudiated Ralph's declaration that she "wanted to see life like a young man," which, had he been disposed to consider her as a complex human, rather than a "charming polygon" might have warned Ralph that Isabel was not so unequivocally dedicated to the world of experience as he believed. When she approaches him with her fears that her wealth may be more than she is morally equal to, he can only express his faith in her, though he for the first time confesses the subjective nature of his faith. Isabel begins:

> "I try to care more about the world than about myself -- but I always come back to myself ... I am afraid; I can't tell you. A large fortune means freedom, and I am afraid of that. It's such a fine thing, and one should make such good use of it. If one shouldn't one would be ashamed. And one must always be thinking -- its a constant effort. I am not sure that it's not a greater happiness to be powerless."
>
> "For weak people I have no doubt it's a greater happiness. For weak people the effort not to be contemptible must be great."
>
> "And how do you know I am not weak?" Isabel asked.
>
> "Ah," Ralph answered, with a blush which the girl noticed, "if you are, I am awfully sold!" [p. 206].

When Isabel, unable to rely on experience, unwilling to accept the advice of others that conflicts with her own impressions, and deceived by her imagination -- in short left at the mercy of her American "virtues", falls in love with her conception of Osmond, Ralph becomes fully aware of the natural and human fallibility of his protege. Sent to warn her, he becomes horrified at the consequences of his "generous" experiment: At last he faces the fact that in refusing to allow Isabel the full scope of humanity, including delusion and folly, he has done her a great wrong:

> She was wrong, but she believed; she was deluded, but she was consistent. It was wonderfully characteristic of her that she had invented a fine theory about Gilbert Osmond, and loved him, not for what he really possessed, but for his very poverties dressed out as honours. Ralph remembered what he had said to his father about wishing to put it into Isabel's power to gratify her imagination. He had done so and the girl had taken full advantage of the privilege. Poor Ralph felt sick; he felt ashamed [p. 321].

Ralph, at last in touch with his real emotions, just as he is finally aware of the real Isabel, attempts to explain to her his hopes for her, and in doing so comes to realize his simple human regard and love for her as a person as well meaning and flawed as himself. Isabel, however, is still blinded by the abstract ideals, which Ralph himself, with his greater range of experience, has only just seen beyond, can only perceive that she has been a source of amusement to him. At this point they are at different levels of awareness; she before the "fall", he after:

> "It hurts me," said Ralph, audaciously, "as if I had fallen myself!"
>
> The look of pain and bewilderment deepened in his companion's face.

> "I don't understand you in the least," she repeated. "You say you amused yourself with planning out my future -- I don't understand that. Don't amuse yourself too much or I shall think you are doing it at my expense." [p. 318].

For James the "fall" into knowledge through a sudden tragic awakening on the part of a peculiarly sensitive consciousness is almost always connected with a realization and acceptance of a bond of human interconnectedness and mutual respect and responsibility. Ralph realizes that he "loves Isabel without hope" and at the same moment that most painful realization comes, he realizes that in order to act responsibly toward her he must speak against her deluded love despite the risk of being cut off from her forever. That Ralph speaks out against Osmond, even though it means his removal from the spectacle of "Isabel's originality," grants him the stature of a hero. His isolation is assured so long as Isabel remains "unenlightened." James brings Isabel to her own awareness but she must not only see things as they are, she must forgive Ralph for his "sin" against her and endeavor to act upon her discovery.

Isabel's moment of revelation, when both the reality of her present, as the wife of a sterile and empty man, and her understanding of the past and Ralph's role in it come to the front of her consciousness, occurs in the forty-second chapter: Isabel realizes that, for all her superiority and cleverness, she permitted herself to be deceived by Osmond's facade of urbanity, while she never appreciated the true sensitivity that motivated Ralph's seeming cynicism. She admits that her actions, whatever Ralph's part in setting her up for them, were her own,

and as freely made as any she could have made. Furthermore, she realizes that she and Ralph, despite their superficial contrasts, were as close spiritually and sympathetically as was possible. What she fails to recognize is the importance of sharing her knowledge with Ralph:

> Nothing was a pleasure to her now; how could anything be a pleasure to a woman who knew that she had thrown away her life? ... But Ralph's little visit was a lamp in the darkness; for the hour that she sat with him her spirits rose. She felt to-day as if he had been her brother ... it didn't make Gilbert look any better to sit for half an hour with Ralph ... It was simply that Ralph was generous and that her husband was not ... There was something in Ralph's talk, in his smile, in the mere fact of his being in Rome, that made the blasted circle round which she walked more spacious. He made her feel the good of the world; he made her feel what might have been. He was, after all, as intelligent as Osmond -- quite apart from his being better. And thus it seemed to her an act of devotion to conceal her misery from him. [p. 400]

As the novel progresses the similarities between Isabel and Ralph, at first disguised by their superficial differences--his urbanity and wealth in contrast to her provinciality and limited means, her activity and health against his spectatorship and tabescence -- grow increasingly apparent. These differences, symbolic of the constraints and limitation imposed on the individual by the very fact of mortality, are not overcome by abstract rationalizations and theories, which may attract the sensitive through their promise of intellectual freedom, while in actuality providing a screen from confrontation with the ambiguities of life. The only human victory James allows comes through a gradual recognition, acceptance, and transcendence of such a life by the perceptive consciousness.

Ralph and Isabel from the beginning share a deep preference for the free world of the intellect and imagination, even to the extent of ignoring or distorting the truth. Isabel runs her life according to theories and the power of her imagination, and treasures above all the freedom she believes such an attitude toward life creates. However Ralph too is a theoretician of life and a lover of liberty:

> His outward conformity to the manners that surrounded him was nonetheless the mask of a mind that greatly enjoyed its independence, on which nothing long imposed itself, and which, naturally inclined to jocosity and irony, indulged in a boundless libery of appreciation [p. 35].

The desire to know and enjoy without involvement or commitment can lead to the pernicious life of detatched aestheticism represented by Gilbert Osmond. Humorless, loveless, compassionless, Osmond creates his own prison and sanctuary of appreciation. Ralph and Isabel are impelled toward a similar fate and are saved only by their ability to extend themselves beyond the limits of pure self through humor, compassion, empathy and finally love. Ralph's cynicism and wit allow him to expose himself to reality without requiring others to share in his pain. Isabel's concern that she do the world some "good" with her wealth, and her ability not only to feel compassion for her step-daughter, Pansy, but to be able to sympathize with the girl's mother, Madame Merle, whose desire to see her unacknowledged daughter be well cared for leads her to cruelly betray Isabel's friendship, all help her escape from her concern for self. She demonstrates this sympathy, when having learned the entire truth about Madame Merle, she nevertheless

warns Pansy never to speak unkindly toward her.

But it is in their relationship with each other that Ralph and Isabel finally triumph. Deceived at first by superficialities, unwilling to lose sight of the theories that had made life worth living, it is only as events prove the emptiness of those theories that Ralph and Isabel begin to recognize the importance of their relationship. Ralph, himself admits that he lived as long as he did only in order to watch Isabel. Charles Samuels is unreasonable when he represents Ralph finally as a vicarious vampire, willing to exhaust Isabel indefinitely so long as it provides him with food for detached observation.[5] Ralph acts presumptuously, but he has no reason to suppose himself destructive in providing Isabel with the funds to prove herself. By the time he says that her falling to Osmond makes him feel as if he has fallen also, it is pretty apparent that what he is feeling is not distressed pride but sincere empathy. He does not leave because she is no longer interesting to him, but because until she realizes the consequences of her act, and thereby his guilt in it, he can offer her nothing but the burden of "hopeless love."

Before considering Ralph and Isabel's mutual enlightenment at Gardencourt and its relation to James' treatment of patronage in particular it would be useful to consider James' own attitude toward his principle creations. James chose as the focus of his novel the character of Isabel Archer; nevertheless the character who most shares James' own attitudes and interests is Ralph Touchett. Even discounting autobiographical elements in James' depiction of Ralph, it is largely

through Ralph's impressions and evaluations that we are brought to a proper appreciation of the tale's center, the personality and expanding awareness of Isabel. Not only are we drawn into the narrative by Ralph's interest in and speculations about Isabel's future, but it is through his constant affection for her, even as she fails his expectations, that we are assured of James' own deep feelings for his heroine.

Since, as a discerning witness to many of the novel's key moments, Ralph seems the recipient of authorial sanction, he might appear an entirely positive character. However the attitude of critical detachment necessary for the creation act is neither proper nor sufficient for the complex impersonal relationships of life. Like many of James' early protagonists, Ralph Touchett is lead by his detachment to consider the lives and personal energies of those around him as a medium for his own self-expression. Later, in The Spoils of Poynton, James will consider the temptation to value works of art, the static material expression of man's spirit, above the variable human nature which produced it. In The Portrait of a Lady, however, Ralph is not in danger of making art the measure of life, but rather of failing to distinguish between the two. By applying the critical standards and objectivity of art to life, Ralph dehumanizes the object of his attentions. This dehumanization, even as it exalts Isabel's nature to the level of high art, releases Ralph from the obligation of anticipating the effects of his actions upon Isabel as a fallible human.

However to belittle the potential of Isabel as Gilbert Osmond does because she will not conform to a predetermined ideal is as great

a mistake, perhaps greater, than to ignore her human fallibility. For James the solution to this lay in the sensitive minds ability to transcend either extreme of evaluation through the conscious recognition and acceptance of its own influence upon the other. When Isabel goes to Ralph's deathbed at Gardencourt, they are both limited by a mutual unwillingness to acknowledge to one another the ceaseless reverberation of influences resulting from what each had believed to be independent and liberating actions. Their final acceptance of their inescapable interrelations leads to a triumph over its chaotic meaninglessness through the bond of human love. Their recognition of the meaning each holds for the other gives a supportive value to their previous interactions:

> ... at last he gave a long groan. "Ah, what is it you have done for me?"
>
> "What is it you did for me?" she cried, her extreme agitation half smothered by her attitude. She had lost all her shame, all wish to hide things. Now he might know: for it brought them supremely together, and he was beyond the reach of pain. "You did something once -- you know it. Oh, Ralph, you have been everything! What have I done for you -- " ... nothing mattered now but the knowledge that was not pure anguish -- the knowledge that they were looking at the truth together [pp. 530-531].

Some find this scene distressing. It invites the supposition that James, to overcome a difficulty in plotting, reverted to a stock deathbed confession and reconciliation. However, as discussed in Marius Bewley's article, "Death and the James Family for James death was an affirmation for those left behind of the reality and value of the human consciousness.[6] The power of the dead lies in the memory of the living. Something was, and as knowledge continues to have value. This influence, crystalized by death becomes a standard of life. Ralph expresses it himself:

> There is nothing makes us so much alive as to see others die. That's the sensation of life -- the sense that we remain. I have had it -- even I. But now I am of no use but to give it to others ... You won't lose me -- you will keep me. Keep me in your heart; I shall be nearer to you than I have ever been. Dear Isabel, life is better; for in life there is love. Death is good -- but there is no love" [p. 530].

The necessity for renunciation, even of life, is one of the most difficult aspects of James' art. However in The Portrait of a Lady, it does not diminish the effectiveness of his solution. The potential parasitism of Ralph's determination to know life "through Isabel" is transformed into moral symbiosis by his willingness to give her an affirmation of the integrity of consciousness through death. In their enlightenment a balance is achieved. Ralph, who had entered life and proven his existence and influence through Isabel, at his death becomes the means of granting Isabel an ideal of love that cannot be changed by the processes and mutations of experience. The act of patronage is revealed as a distorting illusion. One must accept responsibility for one's own actions, but to attempt to assume sole responsibility for another is to deny the integrity and free will of the individual.

## The Bostonians

The Bostonians, a novel which with The Princess Casimassima, introduced James' second period, has been the subject of widely divergent criticism since its initial serialization during 1885 and 1886.[1] If immediate popular reaction is taken as the criteria of artistic merit it was one of James' more notable failures. James was informed by one of the publishing periodical's staff "that they had never published anything that appeared so little to interest their readers."[2] James himself, however, felt it to be a greatly undervalued work and regretted having neither the time nor the encouragement to revise and include it in the New York Edition.[3] The Bostonians had been from its conception in 1883 intended as a response to the charge that James' pro-European attitude rendered him incapable of a literary representation of the American scene.[4] It was to be, James wrote his publisher, J. R. Osgood, "as local, as American, as possible, and full of Boston: an attempt to show that I can write an American story."[5]

Among the critics who feel James succeeded in his attempt, Richard Poirier states in an evaluation of The Europeans, the only other novel excepting the late and unfinished The Ivory Tower to deal specifically with an American setting, that James had succeeded "in expressing a view of America, particularly, of New England, which is more deeply and provocatively personal than any to be found in his novels before The Bostonians."[6] Oscar Cargill quotes approvingly Howell's comment that, "Every character [of The Bostonians] is managed with

masterly clearness and power," and further commends it as indicative of James' appreciation and adaption of French naturalism.[7]

In opposition to such positive evaluations Mark Twain, an acknowledged and often vitriolic critic of James' style, may have expressed the reasons for the novel's initial lack of popular appeal when he declared it labored, tedious and deadeningly analytical;[8] Carl Van Doren, in a similar strain, declared it "too largely skeleton, without the blood which might have come from heartier sympathies, without the flesh with which James might have been able to round out a 'purely American' tale had he not forgotten so much about American life."[9] Finally it would seem that The Bostonians despite what James regarded as a certain "psychological redundancy" in its characterizations, yields considerable insight and acuteness of observation, not always of the order to recommend it to his countrymen in its relation of the human and the national character. But it is a book which requires careful reading.

James took pains to select a subject "characteristic of [American] social conditions," and found his needs answered by "the situation of woman, the decline of the sentiment of sex, the agitation on their behalf."[10] The narration of the relationship between Olive Chancellor and Verena Tarrant, which was for James the center of the book, was seen as "a study of one of those friendships between women which are so common in New England."[11]

One result of this concern for "setting" in The Bostonians, is a lesser emphasis on the dynamics of consciousness than is generally alloted by James. Perhaps James' confessed ignorance of the people and

things he had set out to describe as well as a personal revulsion from the quackery and fanaticism which seems an inevitable offshoot of any radical reform movement, disuaded him from identifying very closely with the subjects of this novel.[12] At any rate it is uncharacteristically objective in its point of view. In his original projection the novel had a more characteristic form; it was to relate "the struggle that takes place in the mind of [Verena Tarrent]."[13] However this is not the form it ultimately took: none of the characters in The Bostonians engages our sympathy to the extent of Ralph Touchett or Isabel Archer in The Portrait of A Lady, or Roger Lawrence in the early Watch and Ward, to give only a few examples of the type of flawed yet ultimately admirable character that James generally chose as the center of his work.

Even this objectivity is open to varying critical interpretations. Charles Thomas Samuel's finds it makes the novel "sharper, wittier, and more amiable than James' typical fiction,"[14] while Van Doren deprecates it on the grounds that "James regarded [his characters] only too obviously from without."[15] However I believe Cargill is correct in his statement that the presentation of one character at least, Olive Chancellor, is a masterpiece of "psychological penetration."[16] To admit the novel's relative objectivity is not to deny it all the characteristics of James' other works. That the theme of one being's attempt to manipulate or experience life through and at the art of another should play such an important part in this uncharacteristic novel, as it does in the central relationship between Olive Chancellor and Verena Tarrant, as well as in the more recognizably Jamesian works, is indicative of its importance to James.

Briefly The Bostonians relates the struggle that takes place for the affection of Verena Tarrant, an attractive, idealistic, lower middle class Bostonian. The primary combatants are Basil Ransom, a handsome conservative Southerner seeking to rebuild his war ravaged fortune by courting the financial opportunities of the victorious North, and Olive Chancellor, a cold intellectual of Boston society who has dedicated her life, literally, to the Women's Rights Movement. Basil bases his claim upon Verena on his masculine and personal love for her, Olive on the good Verena's oracular talents can do for the movement. Verena, who is capable both of romantic love and idealistic dedication, is offered no compromise by her two suitors. Ransom, unsympathetic to the cause of women's rights, demands that she abandon her feminist friends entirely and live only for his love, while the sexually neurotic Olive demands that Verena renounce all interest in marriage.

Verena is further isolated and made to suffer under these conflicting demands by her intimate's hypocritical and self-serving devotion to any cause that might yield either money or prestige. Her father, a particularly opportunistic mesmerist, and her mother almost literally sell her to Olive, and the young woman's other male suitor, Mathias Pardon, yields his claim for an interest in her career. Even the purity of Olive's selfless dedication and Basil's personal love are suspect. Whether or not James consciously meant to suggest lesbianism as the root of Olive's neurosis, her interest in and possessiveness towards Verena are unhealthily strong. Just as Olive's demands for dedication to the cause may cover sexual jealousy, Basil's contention that Verena was "made for love" seems somehow linked with his reactionary and ungenerous dedication to male supremacy.

Control of the life and consciousness of Verena Tarrant is thus the prize that initiates the action of the novel, and those who struggle for it are among the least likeable in James' gallery of patrons of life and usurpers of consciousness. Mr. and Mrs. Tarrant and Pardon lack entirely the dimensions of insight and sensitivity which mark James's central characters. It is then Ransom and Olive who are the chief embodiments of the "artist of life." While Ransom is ultimately triumphant, it is Olive, both in complexity and capacity for insight, who is the more moving. This is true despite James's refusal to lose his objectivity long enough to allow the reader the sympathetic identification generally created for such a character in his novels.

Our first view of Verena occurs at the feminist meeting to which Olive has brought her distant relative Basil. Even this early in the novel Verena is distinguished largely by her passivity, attractiveness, and air of promise. She is described as others see her, being led about the room by her parents. She scarcely seems present as Mr. Selah Tarrant and his wife propose, explain, and agree to her giving the elderly reformist Miss Birdseye a demonstration of her talent for "inspirational" rhetoric.

Verena's inability to resist such characters and their determination to control her life, makes her a doubtful vehicle to carry the novel's center of interest as James had originally intended. In this her position is similar to that of young Roderick, who in <u>Roderick Hudson</u> was caught between, and finally destroyed by the interested artistic patronage of Rowland and sexual appeal of Christina Light.

Although the sexes are reversed in The Bostonians, as in Roderick, it is the manipulative characters who make the greatest impression upon the reader. However the later novel surpasses the earlier in maturity and richness, and James's depiction of Verena is much more complex and true to life than that of the broad but ultimately one dimensional Hudson.

Bruce R. McElderry makes a strong assessment of Verena's dependency and subordinate dramatic appeal:

> Verena herself seems incapable of independence ... Her eloquence, as the reader experiences it through Basil Ransom's response, is juvenile ... As Basil tells her later, he listens only to her voice. If, as James says, Oliver's talking up of Verena is 'only a kind of elderly, ridiculous doll-dressing,' then Verena is the doll .... [In] the melodramatic conclusion, when Ransom takes her away from the Boston Music Hall, Verena seems almost a bystander. The argument against her "career" is pressed by Ransom against Verena's parents, Olive, and a harried promoter ... "17

Having determined that despite, or more probably in accordance with, Verena's innocence, idealism, and receptiveness, her character presents a particularly attractive power vacuum for the more dominant personalities surrounding her, the question arises what in the natures of Ransom and Miss Chancellor leaves them especially vulnerable to the temptation to meddle fundamentally in the young girl's life.

Basil's interest in Verena is at once more readily acceptable and ultimately less critically assessable than Olive's. Basil is appealing in his insistent desire to rescue Verena from what he recognizes as an essentially pernicious situation. Some critics find this a strong enough motive for assigning James's own approbation and point of view to Ransom:

> Freezing would have been Verena's fate had not James provided as Olive's antagonist a hot-blooded young cousin from the South. Basil Ransom, as his name suggests, functions to rescue Verena from the dangerous cant of which she had been the innocent conductor. Realizing that her cause is merely the latest of mob delights, Basil determines to save Verena for a life of privacy and love ... Basil has rescued Verena not only from sexual perversion but from all methods of exploiting the private soul for public gain ... Even in the more attractive decisions of his other heroes ... there is a taint of the arbitrary ... It can be said of The Bostonians that no reader, whatever his beliefs, can disapprove of James's loyalties ... [18]

Unfortunately the event that Samuelson choses to illustrate his argument suggests that Ranson's motives are not so universally commendable as Samuelson would have them. Immediately prior to the hour designated for Verena's grand lecture on feminism before a rowdy and frightening mob, Basil enters and overpowers Verena with the declaration, "Not for worlds, not for millions, shall you give yourself to that rearing crowd .... You are mine, you are not theirs." Earlier he declares, "The masculine character ... -- that is what I want you to preserve ... and ... I don't in the least care what becomes of you ladies while I make the attempt."[1] Not only is Ransom's rigid sexism and insistent virility uncharacteristic of James's sensitive individual, but it is rather strongly reminiscent of Isabel Archer's persistent suitor, Caspar Goodwood. In The Portrait of a Lady capitulation to such a character is compared to death, and Isabel acts on her critical self-revelation in rejecting him. Although the decaying feminist movement, which James compares to a witches' Sabbath in The Bostonians, deserves repudiation, it is unlikely that James would expect entirely opposing responses to such similar characters. Indeed the closing lines

of the book reinforce the impression that Ransom's actions are to a large extent motivated by a desire for the self-gratification of his need to dominate:

> Ransom, palpitating with his victory, felt now a little sorry for her and was relieved to know that, even when exasperated, a Boston audience is not ungenerous. "Ah, now I am glad!" said Verena, when they reached the street. But though she was glad, he presently discovered that, beneath her hood, she was in tears. It is to be feared that with the union, so far from brilliant, into which she was about to enter, these were not the last she was destined to shed.[20]

Basil, secure in his own personal triumph, is scarcely aware or interested in the painful sacrifice of ideals he is requiring of Verena. In a sense she is becoming as much his doll as she was Olive's. How different is the mood of this scene of physical union without shared awareness, from that of mutual insight and irrevocable physical separation that occurs between Isabel and Ralph on his death bed. With this in mind Samuelson's comment that, although Verena will not live happily ever after, at least "she will live" sounds disturbingly complacent.

If Basil resorts to social convention to justify his arbitrary manipulation of Verena's fate, Olive employs the mask of social reform to disguise her own personal motives for exercising control over Verena's very consciousness. Although her demand is more unreasonable, her motive less acceptable, and her defeat more desirable, than Basil's, I believe there is considerable evidence to indicate that, of the three personalities who form <u>The Bostonians</u> curious triangle, hers is the one most promising in terms of James's doctrine of the intellectual triumph of the sensitive imagination.

Cargill notes "the pains which James took to establish the environment that produced Olive Chancellor and made the contest for Verena possible."[21] This sociological determinism together with James's decision to sustain the objectivity of his technique made it artistically and thematically undesirable to force Olive's character into the pattern of the self-deceived heroine brought through a sensitive consciousness in contact with often tragic experience to a revelation of awareness and understanding. Olive is a deeply, even basically, flawed character, but this very imperfection of her rich character grants her finally tragic stature.

Unlike Basil Ransom, who with his stampeding vitality, dramatic good looks and gracious Southern manners, verges on the stereotyped hero, Olive's villainous qualities are elaborated with suggestion of psychological motives. During Ransom's initial interview James description of her appearance and manner seems almost a caricature:

> ... a smile of exceeding faintness played about her lips -- it was just perceptible enough to light up the native gravity of her face. It might have been likened to a thin ray of moonlight resting upon the wall of a prison ... Ransom observed that Miss Chancellor's hand was at once cold and limp; she merely placed it in his, without exerting the smallest pressure [p. 8 ].

Almost immediately afterward, however, James begins to suggest layers of psychological complexity beyond those necessary for Olive's functions in the novel. The tone is frequently ironic but the depth of character and the potential for suffering that is an innate part of her character comes through:

> Miss Olive Chancellor, it may be confided to the reader, ... was subject to fits of tragic shyness during which she was unable to meet even her own eyes in the mirror [p. 10].

Like Isable Archer, Olive has determined to run her life according to abstract principles, although in Olive's case the need to construct these forms for life is much more desperate than it is for the self-satisfied Isabel. Ransom sees "in a flash that no one could help her: that was what made her tragic" (p. 11). And James stresses the pathetic and fear ridden origins of her actions:

> Olive had a fear of everything, but her greatest fear was of being afraid. She wished immensely to be generous, and how could one be generous unless one ran a risk? She erected it into a sort of rule of conduct that whenever she saw a risk she was to take it ... [p. 14].

Olive is attracted to Verena, at least in part, by the younger girl's gift for speaking, which Olive with her "fits of tragic shyness," can never hope to achieve. The great originality of James's characterization of Olive is placing her between characters of sensitivity who transcend their limitations by the exercise of a sympathetic imagination, and, on the other hand, characters so lacking in sensitivity that they never suffer from an awareness of their folly. Ralph Touchett can recognize his mistake in attempting to achieve safe gratification in life through manipulating another and enter into a truer relationship of equal give and take. Olive's very nature, despite her sensitivity, denies her this resolution.

James informs us that before taking on the management of Verena, Olive had attempted to enter into "generous" relationships with

certain young shop girls who were frightened by her advances into the arms of their young men. That Olive Chancellor's ability to respond emotionally and quite possibly physically, is limited to members of her own sex is made clear by her demand that Verena leave Mr. and Mrs. Tarrant and become her roommate, as well as her insistence that Verena reject marriage completely.

While Ralph Touchett's recognition and acceptance of the true nature of his interest in Isabel frees him from the destructive pose of detached interest and patronage, for Olive to admit the truth about her relationship with Verena would be to plunge her from morbidity to madness. Her sensitivity, however, makes it impossible for her to shut out the effects, if not the origin, of such a socially unacceptable passion. Her inability at times even to meet her own eyes in the mirror indicates the subconscious self-horror that this engenders in her. In a scene that suggests a dark reflection of Isabel's own coming to awareness, Olive waits with Verena after the girl has given into the awareness of her love for Ransom. Olive enters the darkened room and finds Verena sitting in a sort of state of shock.

> Olive stopped short, and for a minute the two women remained as they were, gazing at each other in the dimness. After that ... Olive ... only went to Verena and sat down beside her and took her hand with an irresistible impulse of compassion and reassurance. From the way it lay in her own she guessed her whole feeling -- saw it was a kind of shame, shame for her weakness ... Olive understood or thought she understood and the wofulness of it all only seemed the deeper [p. 412].

I can see no reason to assign sinister motives to Olive's taking of Verena's hand. Only a few moments before she had been

expressing "a wild personal passion, a desire to take her friend in her arms again on any terms, even those most cruel to herself." Those terms would be the open manifestation of her own unacknowledged love. It is a brief flash of self-awareness, but unlike Isabel, Olive cannot express her affection in any positive way. When she sees how deeply injured Verena has been by the battle she merely takes her hand with genuine compassion.

Olive's submergence of her own desperate, if unconventional, needs gives her a moment's unity with Verena, but it is a negative act in strictly psychological terms. Olive represses it at the cost of self-illumination. The scene is one of silence, darkness and settling ambivalence:

> She would just sit there and hold her hand; that was all she could do; they were beyond each other's help in any other way now. Verena leaned her head back and closed her eyes, and for an hour, as nightfall settled in the room, neither of the young women spoke. Distinctly, it was a kind of shame. After a while the parlour-maid ... appeared on the threshold with a lamp; but Olive motioned her frantically away. She wished to keep the darkness. It was a kind of shame [p. 412-13].

Olive, denied by forces within her own character, ~~though~~ and beyond her control, the revelation which brought Ralph and Isabel a transcendent understanding of, and triumphant coming to terms with, the reality of their relationship, is doomed to continue seeking satisfaction in life through the domination of Verena in the name of some falsely founded idealism. Until Ransom replaces her in Verena's life, Olive is bound in the role of a vampire disguised as the champion of its victim. Her sublimated awareness of this horrible truth and the toll is exacts in her life makes Olive a "most original creation, although because of

the repugnant elements of her nature, the one hardest to establish in general appreciation."[20]

In The Bostonians James worked out a further complexity in his depiction of character in relation to the theme of patronage. Having in The Portrait of a Lady achieved a definitive statement on the means by which the "free" character, using Richard Poirier's terminology, moved by virtue of a sympathetic imagination beyond the restricted realm of "fixed" characters and their unrealized relationships, in the character of Olive Chancellor he first created the Bad Heroine, whose inability to achieve the peace granted the true heroine, did not permit her easy dismissal. While Olive represented a state of being in which sensitivity and intelligence were frustrated by an inner flaw, Ransom personified moral certitude devoid of sympathetic perceptiveness. The creation of characters between the "fixed" and the "free" did much to enrich the reality of consciousness which James sought to depict through his art.

## The Spoils of Poynton

James' initial sketch for a story concerning "the situation of the mother deposed, by the ugly English custom, turned out of the big house on the son's marriage and relegated," gives the form, but little of the feeling of its final product, The Spoils of Poynton.[1] In his notebook James recorded the bare substance of the plot as it first presented itself to his imagination:

> One can imagine the rebellion, in this case ... of a particular sort of proud woman -- a woman who had loved her home, ... (with a knowledge and adoration of artistic beauty, the tastes, the habits of a collector) ... There would be the particular type and taste of the wife the son would have chosen -- a wife out of a Philestine, a tasteless, a hideous house; the kind of house the very walls and furniture of which constitute a kind of anguish for such a woman as I suppose the mother to be. That kind of anguish occurred to me, previously, as a subject ... I thought of the strange, the terrible experience of a nature with a love and passion for beauty, united by adverse circumstances to such a family ... I imagine the mother having fixed on a girl ... for the son to marry; a girl with the same exquisite tastes that she has and having grown up surrounded with lovely things. The son doesn't in the least take to this girl -- he perversely and stupidly, from the mother's point of view, takes to a girl infatuated with hideousness. It is in this girl's people's house, before the marriage, that the story opens. The mother meets there the other girl ... the one with whom she discovers a community of taste -- of passion, of sensibility and suffering.[2]

I give this rather lengthy first outline, not so much to note the particular revisions James made in the course of working out his theme, which remained, so far as the principle action, essentially true to its conception, but rather to consider the motive for his singular shift of concern from the mother's (who became Adela Gereth in the novel) aesthetic

"anguish" to her protegee's (Fleda Vetch) experience "of passion, of sensibility and suffering." By the time he came to write the Preface to The Spoils of Poynton James could relate:

> For something like Fleda Vetch had surely been latent in one's first apprehension of the theme; it wanted, for treatment, a centre, and ... this image ... sprung up in its place. ... Mrs. Gereth was, obviously, with her pride and her pluck, of an admirable fine paste; but she was not intelligent, was only clever, and therefore would have been no use to us at all as centre of our subject ... [3]

So Fleda Vetch replaces Mrs. Gereth as the center of the novel. James stated that "while the others but feel ... Fleda almost demonically sees and feels." The novel thus came not to relate simply the effect of one woman's passion for the beautiful, but the struggle of a consciousness at once sensitive to beauty of the "things", vulnerable to the temptation to gain them through her influence on others, and yet aware, as no other character is, of the immorality of such an action. Because she is poor and her influence is originally through Mrs. Gereth, and then because she is in love with Owen, Fleda is exposed to great temptation.

James certainly shares Mrs. Gereth's despair in "the awful Mona Brigstock, who is all will, without the smallest leak of force into taste or tenderness or vision, into any sense of shades, or relations or proportions."[4] I don't believe that Charles Thomas Samuel's assertion that "when the smoke clears, the delighted reader perceives that Mrs. Gereth and Mona are indeed sisters in arms,"[5] quite does justice to James' conception of the woman "who had loved her house." Mrs. Gereth's appreciation of beauty does not quite put her on the same plane as the "so thriftily constructed Mona, able at any moment to bear the whole of her dead weight

at once on any given inch of a resisting surface."[6] Mona's lack of imagination, the prerequisite to an appreciation for art, and for James, strangely, triumphant failure, frees her from the conflicting rules of conscience that hampers both Fleda Vetch and Mrs. Gereth. As James states it:

> Fleda, obliged to neglect inches, sees and feels but in acres and expanses and blue perspectives; Mrs. Gereth too, in comparison, while her imagination broods, drops half the stitches of the web she seeks to weave.[7]

Both Fleda and Adela Gereth fall to Mona Brigstock through the agency of their own sensitivity. An early scene in The Spoils makes clear her supremacy over them is in her very insensitivity and materialism. When Mrs. Gereth, after a grand speech whose insinuations and scarcely veiled insults horrify Fleda, tosses at the departing Miss Brigstock a vulgar fashion magazine, her theatrical gesture is neutralized by Mona's ability to reduce it to a physical level.

> Mrs. Gereth, delivering herself from the doorstep, had tossed the periodical higher in the air than was absolutely needful -- tossed it toward the carriage the retreating party was about to enter. Mona, from force of habit, the reflex action of the custom of sport, had popped out, with a little spirng, a long arm and intercepted the missile as easily as she would have caused a tennis ball to rebound from a racket. "Good catch!" Owen had cried, so genuinely pleased that practically no notice was taken of his mother's impressive remarks.[8]

Mrs. Gereth's action and Fleda's passive horror begin to point to crucial difference between their imaginations. Even James' linking of them in their failure to overcome Mona's design is suggestive in its imagery. Fleda Vetch "sees and feels" both, objectively at least, passive activities. Moreover the terms used to describe her activities are ones associated with freedom and expansion. Mrs. Gereth, on the other hand, spiderlike seeks to weave a web, a means of restraint and constriction; and not self-restrictive

but designed to ensnare and control others.

How, within the action of the drama, does James illustrate the nature of Mrs. Gereth's sensibilities? His first image of her is distinctly humorous and eccentric as she suffers under the roof of the Philistine Brigstocks. James' description of the house is such that we are reassured that Mrs. Gereth is not a constitutional malcontent. Fleda herself, who later shows a marked ability to sympathize with the sentiment behind, if not the result, of personal furnishing, remembers with horror:

> ... a conservatory where she had caught a bad cold in the company of a stuffed cockatoo fastened to a tropical bough and a waterless fountain composed of shells stuck into some hardened paste [pp. 149-50].

There is a genius in James' description of Waterbath as the antithesis of Poynton which does not support Oscar Cargill's contention that we are not really given grounds for trusting Fleda's perceptions at Poynton, because of Mrs. Gereth's influence and Fleda's own inexperience.[9] The furnishings of Waterbath, described in detail, unlike Poynton, almost guarantee in their garishness the "taste" of Poynton:

> The house was perversely full of souvenirs of places even more ugly than itself and of things it would have been a pious duty to forget. The worst horror was the acres of varnish, something advertised and smelly, with which everything was smeared ... [p. 130].

Cargill's suggestion is fundamentally untenable within the plot of Poynton, if only because, as I will discuss later, the "spoils" are, as James stated, the center of the drama, and it is necessary that they have a certain value, the value of the aesthetic, in order that the rest of the action be judged in its proper relation to them. If they were themselves suspect, the entire fabric of the novel would be rent by such doubts and ambiguities that any evaluation would be pointless.

Mrs. Gereth is then a woman of exquisite taste. This, in itself, is a mark in her favor. She is extraordinarily fond of Fleda, another example of good taste. However her action in offering Fleda to Owen as a more suitable match and then attempting to insult Mona into defeat reveal for Fleda and the reader her essential weakness: "The truth was simply that all Mrs. Gereth's scruples were on one side and that her ruling passion had in a manner despoiled her of her humanity." Mrs. Gereth's "ruling passion" is the perfection of Poynton. She was, from the first, imagined by James as a "woman who had loved her house." Poynton, lacking the "humanity" necessary to be a "home" is a structure turned into a temple of material perfection. This perfection is not itself wrong; it is Mrs. Gereth's relation to it to the detriment of her feelings for other humans, her son, Owen, and Fleda Vetch included.

Blinded by her passion, she lacks all intuition into those around her, and with it all sympathy for their essential dignity. She cannot understand Fleda's refusal to serve as bait to lure Owen away from Mona any more than she can anticipate Mona's final reversal and victory:

> The lady's perfect blankness was from the first a sign of her serene conscience, and the fact that till indoctrinated she didn't even know what Fleda meant by resenting her late offense to every susceptibility gave our young woman a ... scared perception that her own value in the house was just the value ... of a good agent ... Mrs. Gereth ... was secretly suprized at her not being as happy to be sacrificed to the supremacy of a high standard as she was happy to sacrifice her [p. 152].

James, earlier, in the figures of Rowland, the patron of Roderick Hudson, and Isabel Archer's husband, Osmond, in The Portrait of a Lady, had indicated the dangers the connoisseur ran in his detailed

observation and regard for the material products of man's spirit. For James they were to be valued as manifestations of that spirit, but the constant danger, and the one to which Mrs. Gereth falls, is that of losing sight of art's source in admiration of its effects. In order to run the danger one must have a sensibility beyond that of a Mona Brigstock. James's aesthetes are all creatures of a certain profound sensibility, but that sensibility, constricted, as it is starkly in the case of Osmond, within a single detatched consciousness results in a sensitivity so limited that it cannot discern the quality, or modify the force of influence it has on those around it. Because of its narrowness, it tends to be singularly forceful, as a large amount of water escaping though a single channel and the consequences of their unchecked influence can be massively destructive, as it almost invariably is in James's novels. Osmond and Ralph, both culprits, though different in essence, contribute to the tragedy of Isabel Archer. Olive Chancellor, in The Bostonians, almost destroys her protegee, Verena, through her manipulation, made desperate by her repressed passions. Even as early as Watch and Ward, the hero, Roger, struggled with the desire to control his charge Nora so that he might experience a relationship which his own sensitivity caused him to reject in the vulgar world.

James's answer to this tendency of the aesthetically appreciative human to become detached, inhuman, and manipulative is given its clearest statement in the character of Fleda Vetch:

> Fleda's ingratiating stroke, for importance, on the threshold, had been that she would understand; and positively, from that moment, the progress and march of my tale became and remained that of her understanding ... From beginning to end, in "The Spoils of Poynton," appreciation even of the very whole, lives in Fleda;

> which is precisely why, as a consequence rather grandly imposed, everyone else shows for comparatively stupid; the tangle, the drama, the tragedy and the comedy of those who appreciate consisting so much of their relation with those who don't.[10]

Fleda is saved from sharing Mrs. Gereth's flaw, by her ability to extend her imagination, not only over concrete wonders, like Poynton, but into the very consciousness of others. Again and again she demonstrates this innate ability to perceive, and imaginatively experience the inner humanity of those around her. She perceives Mona's inner strength, Owen's weakness and even is able to look through the physical surface of Mrs. Gereth's great aunt's home into the soul that lay behind its creation:

> The house was crowded with objects of which the aggregations somehow made a thinness and the futility a grace; things that told her they had been gathered as slowly and lovingly as the golden flowers of Poynton ... The more she looked about the surer she felt of the character of the maiden-aunt, the sense of whose dim presence urged her to pacification: the maiden-aunt had been a dear; she would have adored the maiden-aunt. The poor lady had had some tender little story; she had been sensitive and ignorant and exquisite: That too was a sort of origin, a sort of atmosphere for relics and rarities, though different from the sorts most prized at Poynton [ p. 164].

Fleda's ability to project herself, through her imagination, into the emotions and fears of others prevents her from acting for what even critics would term "her own good", not simply because of perversity, but because, unlike the other characters of the novel, she is not limited to simply one location or plane of being. Her own interest is so different that it is impossible for her to act in one interest without violating another.

Thus she has her own love for Owen, her awareness of his imperfect love, caught between her spirit and Mona's body, and her concern for the art treasures of Poynton as well as a sort of "pity" for Mona's

majestic denseness. She does not reject Owen's declaration of love, nor does she attempt to use the influence she has to play Mrs. Gereth's and Mona's mutual stubborness against each other and carry off the prizes, Owen and Poynton, herself. Fleda triumphs when she at once expresses her emotions for Owen and at the same time refuses to use them and her influence as tools to force others into yielding to her wishes.

Mrs. Gereth was not allowed the center of the novel since to do so would have been to limit the values of Poynton to their puny material worth. Through Fleda Vetch, not primarily characterized by her "love of the house" as Mrs. Gereth must be to provide the plot, James was able to increase the reader's awareness of the relation between the objects, the desire for which, when limited to their physical possession, denied and frustrated human relationships, and the essence of the "spoils", the liberating artistic and humanistic imagination, which when it was rejected in the person of Fleda, brought down in flames its entire superstructure.

## The Golden Bowl

James's desire in The Golden Bowl was, as it was throughout his works, to convey the whole of a situation through the limited but expanding perceptions of an individual consciousness. The factors which limit James's central characters are most frequently associated with two states of mind, which are themselves identified with the cultures of America and Europe. Thus, for James, the American was prone, through an innocence, whose positive aspect was high moral integrity, to reduce the complexity of both human relationships and art to such pragmatic and self-righteous levels that he was vulnerable to the charge of social insensitivity and materialism. Thus Christopher Newman in The American can scarcely judge between an original in the Louvre and a very bad copy. Similarly the heroine in The Portrait of a Lady, Isabel Archer, is wrecked on the shores of her own rugged individualism when her ignorance does not allow her to discern the hollowness in Osmond's cultivation of aesthetic perfection.

The European, on the other hand, by virtue of being the product of forms established in such antiquity that their original content had too often shrivelled up or proven unequal to or absurd in the face of contemporary society, was apt to ignore those moral distinctions which gave human existence an inner sanctity and purpose in favor of mere form. Their reverence for form, however, allowed them greater insight into art and tolerance for the variousness of human behavior, so long as it was tastefully executed. Such characters seldom form the nucleus of James's novels, possibly because it is more difficult

to portray the growth of moral awareness in a character already defined by a degree of moral laxness than it is to convey an innocent's initiation into experience. However either way the result is the same, as illustrated by the relationship between Isabel Archer and Ralph Touchett. The blindness resulting from either complacent innocence or unenlightened experience leaves the character without the proper sense of relationship to the whole. Those characters who sense their own blindness and seek, often by groping into sudden understanding, to transcend it are typical Jamesian heros and heroines.

The four main characters of The Golden Bowl, whose "whole" is the structure of the novel, Maggie Verver and her father, Adam Verver, the Prince Amingo and Charlotte Stant, are almost classifiable according to the degree of their enlightenment, indicating on James part an atypical willingness to blur the edges that had previously distinguished the "saved" or perceptive hero from his "damned" or insensitive comrades.

However, the two characters who stand out as manipulatives, however well meaning, and patronizing, however ignorant they are of the nature of their patronage, are Maggie and Adam Verver. As is frequently the case in assessments of James's major characters, there are widely divergent critical interpretations of what traits James wished the reader to perceive in his rendering of these characters. Walter F. Wright, in The Madness of Art summarizes the extremes succinctly:

> Maggie Verver and her father Adam exemplify the evil which James identified with American Puritanism and materialism; they use their wealth to buy a husband for Maggie and a wife for Adam, and they draw upon a ruthless moral code to hold the two victims, Charlotte and

> Amerigo, in subjection .... or Maggis is a virtual saint, who, in her love and wisdom symbolizes a divine compassion that can even rescue such sinners as Amerigo and Charlotte ...

While both views cannot possibly be true, throughout the body of the novel, there are at least two possible explanations for such opposing assessments of characters. Either they, the characters, undergo some moral transformation during the course of the novel, or their actions can be assessed according to two different lights, (i.e., according to the intent or according to the consequences of their deeds). In the case of Maggie Verver and her father, both are probably true. In The Golden Bowl James did not attempt to relate a simple tale to a complex moral, or a complex tale to a simple moral, but to "show rather than tell" the genesis and conclusion of a penetrating examination of the entanglements and revelations of human consciousness.

How then do Maggie and Adam act in the patronage relationships they have established with the Prince and Charlotte, and what conclusions can be drawn concerning them in the light of these relationships? First it is necessary to look briefly at the two recipients of their attention, Amerigo and Charlotte.

The Prince Amerigo is the only wholly European character of the four and James drew him with considerable appreciation of both the assets and deficiencies he found dominant in the European character. It is his charm, beauty and social graciousness that make him a desirable acquisition to the Ververs. Within his own sphere of reference he is also entirely honest and open. What he suppresses he suppresses not to gain some questionable end at the expense of others, but to avoid

unpleasantness. Nevertheless, in Cargill's words:

> ... the Prince is a hollow man to Henry James and an inadequate man to himself because he lacks something of the precious moral sense of his wife and his father-in-law .... The Prince is not a wicked man -- his afterthought shows him possessed of the empathy that is the basis of all ethical conduct, but he is an amoral, an uninstructed man.[2]

The Prince has, in other words an instinct for the rightness of form which includes naturally art and society and a basic deep humanity. The first is not a gift which James dismisses lightly. It can be the key to a certain vision of truth which is inaccessable to the morally sure, but artistically unperceptive. It is this gift which finally allows him to come to proper appreciation of Maggie. He describes this inner resource to Charlotte, during a discussion of the flawed crystal bowl had thought to present him as a wedding gift:

> She thought again. 'Thank goodness then that if there be a crack we know it! But if we perish by cracks in things we don't know -- .' And she smiled with the sadness of it ...
>
> He considered, but he met it. 'Ah, but one does know. I do, at least -- and by instinct. I don't fail. That will always protect me.'[3]

After Maggie acts with diplomacy and taste to win him from Charlotte, he can appreciate her instinctively and see that her newly proven sympathy and balance united with her high moral sense makes her the perfect guide he had earlier expressed the need for to Fanny Assingham. Recognizing in Maggie these qualities he replies to her comment on the "new" "splendid" Charlotte:

> "See"? I see nothing but you! And the truth of it had with this force, after a moment, so strangely lighted his eyes that, as for pity and dread of them, she buried her own in his heart [p. 603].

Charlotte Stant, on the other hand is more problematic. It is she, after the termination of her affair with Amerigo, who initiates the renewal of their meeting under the context of helping her friend, Maggie, prepare for this wedding. Some critics, among them F. R. Leavis and Feren Nahn, here found Charlotte's interested passion, which motivates her actions, to be a remedy for the mutually absorbed father and daughter who create the conditions which Maggie and the Prince only take up. Again I believe Cargill is right in his assessment of Charlotte:

> Of the passion-driven "bad" heroines of Henry James, Charlotte Stant is most like Marie de Vionnet and most unlike Kate Croy, in that she is mastered by her blind affection for her former lover and not ridden by any other motive .... Like the Prince, she is an amoral person .... Her superior sophistication, the fact that she has been in America, makes her amorality harder to accept, even though we have no demonstrations of conscience -- to distinguish it from consideration, which is a matter of tact and good manners, until we reflect that her nearly total surrender to passion interferes with reflections and conduct to the extent of blotting them out. She is able to rationalize and justify her behavior to herself, and to kill whatever qualms a different person might have had.[4]

Charlotte and Amerigo share not only an amoral outlook and European sophistication, they share relative poverty, and it is this which places them in the hands of the wealthy American innocents, Maggie and Adam Verver.

Adam Verver's is the less explored character of the two and the reader is not so aware or clear on his manner of adjustment to the situation in which he finds himself. He is presented by James as a wealthy American art collector who seeks to complete the collection of what he finds aesthetically desirable by buying his adored daughter a

husband of standards corresponding to those of his art purchases. He speaks of the Prince with the vocabulary of an art collector and Maggie's attempt to put Amerigo at his ease by dismissing the matter of money in ironic terms nevertheless reflects the atmosphere of his home:

> You're at any rate a part of his collection, ... one of the things that can only be got over here. You're a rarity, an object of beauty, an object of price. You're not perhaps absolutely unique, but you're so curious and eminent that there are very few others like you -- you belong to a class about which everything is known. You're what they call a <u>morceau de musee</u> [p. 46].

The readiness to collect people as things is a serious flaw, but James does not deprive Adam of all virtue. For one thing he seems strangely aware of the nature of the "sin" he and Maggie are committing and it almost seems as if he is waiting to see what will become of her before he acts on his perceptions. One of his ~~early~~ comments is particularly interesting in the judgement it implies on their actions:

> There seems a kind of charm, doesn't there? on our life ... A kind of wicked selfish prosperity perhaps, as if we had grabbed everything, fixed everything, down to the last lovely object for the last glass case of the last corner, left over, of my old show. That's the only taking off, that it has made us perhaps lazy, a wee bit languid -- lying like gods together, all careless of mankind [p. 401].

This view of a man, made powerful by fortune and circumstance, and in a position to use that power even over others, as Adam is, is one which many of James's characters struggle long and hard to achieve; however Adam continues in his close insulated relationship with his daughter, even after his marriage at Maggie's urging to Charlotte. Even here, however, he shows a certain sage shrewdness. Perhaps it is his growing love for Charlotte, or perhaps a realization that the close

relationship he has with his daughter is threatening her happiness in marriage, at any rate it is he who first suggests the flaw in their relationship:

> "We want each other ... only wanting it each time, for each other. That's what I call the happy spell; but its also a little, possibly, the immorality."
>
> "The immorality?" She had pleasantly echoed.
>
> "Well we're tremenduously moral for ourselves -- that is for each other; and I won't pretend that I know exactly at whose particular personal expense you and I, for instance are happy ... " [p. 402] .

It is extremely difficult to tell how much Adam understands of the situation between Charlotte and Amerigo. It is hard to put some of his remarks, such as the one above, in their proper perspective if we discount his having any understanding. If he does understand, it indicates his ability to overlook a serious lapse in his wife's behavior both before, and possibly after, their marriage, in order to give her the "happiness" he has given Maggie. I am not certain about the closing remarks about Charlotte as a "success" and "beautiful". It may be argued that this indicates a continued attitude of proprietorship, a desire to create human grandeur through manipulation; however Charlotte had originally abandoned the thought of marriage to the Prince because of lack of wealth. Adam has wealth and the desire to make her happy, and it seems he is reasonably able to. When the married couples disengage themselves from the foursome and spend time together alone, Charlotte reenters, apparently satisfied with her marriage and willing to go with Adam to America. Adam presumably achieved his wealth through American opportunism, and he seems to be prepared to continue using the same means to serve his ends in Europe; however he does not seem entirely insensitive

to the humanity of the people his wealth places in his power.

Maggie Verver, on the other hand, has never had to struggle, never had to see the consequences of power misused, as quite probably Adam has in his business transactions. She is thus entirely innocent, moral and powerful in the opening of the novel. Her putting the Prince off by referring to him jokingly as a museum piece, demonstrates the degree to which she is distanced by youth and inexperience from the emotions of those surrounding her. The fact that she begins the novel as the child of her father and ends after a struggle as Amerigo's dedicated wife, indicates that some development must take place in her character.

Her original dominance over the other characters, particularly Amerigo, is much like that of a small child. She does not suspect that the two spouses, left so much alone together by the father and daughter's preference for each other's company, could possibly be exposed to temptations they are not equipped to resist. In short, at the novel's opening, Maggie is quite deficient in the sort of sympathetic imagination which would allow her to understand the extent to which she and her father, with their wealth, and then with their isolating devotion to each other, are forcing those to whom they owe a human bond of concern into situations which they, the father and daughter, would never willingly condone. The Ververs are unconsciously, but gravely, cruel in their innocence. Even their morality is formed without reference to a complex and fully imagined life.

How does she escape from her self-contained and potentially destructive innocence? As her friend Fanny comments, her "sense will

have to open ... to what's called Evil -- with a very big E: for the first time in her life." As Wright comments:

> Fanny is thinking of evil done of others, and it is to this evil that for a long time Maggie directs her attention. The evil which most matters, however, is that which threatens from within ... [5]

Having been sheltered from the rudeness of life (She comments once that she's never had "the least blow") Maggie, in her innocence, is unproven. She cannot be identified as an active force for good or evil. She is almost as amoral, in a sense, as Amerigo or Charlotte, although Maggie's is the amorality of a small, essentially good and obedient child. She can scarcely be expected to recognize something of which she is entirely ignorant, either in herself or in others.

In her gradual journey into experience and self-knowledge, it is logical that she would first have to evaluate the actions of those around her before she could apply the standards to herself. She fast perceives that her unlimited, and unconscious, power, does not allow her to penetrate the rapport between Amerigo and Charlotte. By first sensing her power through its limitations Maggie is prepared to recognize the consequences of its exploitation by her father and herself.

> [Charlotte and Amerigo] seated, in conversation, at tea, fell thus into the splended effect and the general harmony: Mrs. Ververs and the Prince fairly "placed" themselves, however unwittingly, as high expressions of human furniture required, aesthetically, by such a scene. The fusion of their presence with the decorative elements, their contribution to the triumph of selection, was complete and admirable; though to a lingering view, a view more penetrating than the occasion really demanded, they also might have figured as concrete attestations of a rare power of purchase [p. 597].

This view occurs at the end of the novel, when Maggie has come to recognize the price one must pay for exercising power without understanding. However before Maggie can come to appreciate the "power of purchase" which has created this lovely but morally flawed scene, she must first recognize the flaw. Her awakening into an awareness of the relationship between her husband and her stepmother is slow and painful. She even goes so far as to wish her suspicions justified. This is not really so perverse a wish as it seems at first glance, when one remembers the vacuum from which Maggie is emerging. Her anxious uncertainty creates a limbo between innocence and experience. It is during this time that her thoughts are most tortured. Wright expresses well Maggie's maturation from childish innocence to adolescent perversity resulting from confusion, to mature understanding and sympathy:

> Little by little, however, a new kind of experience comes to her, and it grows out of her very obsession itself. She finds herself more and more wondering what the lives of Charlotte and Amerigo are like, both when they are together and when they are apart; and she begins to feel first pity then timid admiration. She goes through a stage of ambivalence, of fluctuating hate and compassion; but as her imagination continues to rearrange her chaotic impressions, a new order slowly begins to take form.[6]

Maggie Verver comes to have, like that of Fleda Vetch for her nemesis Mona Brigstock, a sympathetic understanding of not only the mechanics of what has gone on around her but the human emotions involved. She can say of Charlotte, whose suffering she now appreciates, "She is great." And in the closing moments of the novel she finally recognizes that the power she had lacked when she ignorantly affected people's lives, was the one power which she now ~~denies~~ desires and can have only with

another's aid -- the power of mature and knowing love. At first, as her nervous joking with Amerigo over his "cost" shows, she had refused to face the possibility that the basis of her power, in this case money, would affect the quality of the results. As she comes to recognize and sympathize with Amerigo's position she wins his love.

The fact that Maggie resorts to a degree of trickery and manipulation to achieve the end has caused some to question her victory. However, although she arranges the circumstances, she, like Fleda Vetch before her, leaves the others to act as they chose. Also all the characters, with the only possible exception of Mr. Verver, know the basic reality of the situation. Amerigo choses to remain with his wife; he has come to value her over his former mistress. Charlotte choses to go with her husband and Maggie to overlook the other's misconduct and the deep hurt they caused her through it. The flaw in the golden bowl has been recognized by all, each is guilty in some way -- of the thoughtless exercise of power, of adultery, of opportunism, of undervaluing the humanity of one's fellow human beings -- and all have suffered as a result. Yet they chose to accept the highest beauty life can offer, even though it contains imperfections. Maggie awakens and shares Amerigo's awareness of the importance of all relationships and the form that helps maintain them, and Amerigo is prepared to accept and value the moral awareness which Maggie personifies.

Power over another is an inescapable aspect of live and human relationships, what is escapable is the mindless or self-gratifying wielding of power without reference to those beneath its sway. In

achieving an awareness of the moral nature of such power, in recognizing that the consequences of wielding power cannot be wholly foretold as it comes into contact with other forces, Maggie exemplifies the perceptive heroine of James's pragmatic ethics.

## Footnotes

### Watch and Ward and Roderick Hudson

[1]Oscar Cargill, The Novels of Henry James (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1961), p. 3.

[2]Ibid., p. 11.

[3]Henry James, Watch and Ward Etc. (London: Macmillan and Company, Limited, 1923), p. 8. All subsequent quotes from this work will be from the same source and the page numbers noted in brackets.

[4]Cargill, p. 12.

[5]Henry James, Roderick Hudson. (London: Macmillan and Company, Limited, 1921), p. 7. All quotes from this work will be from the same source and the page numbers noted in brackets.

[6]Cornelia Pulifer Kelly, The Early Development of Henry James (Illinois: The University of Illinois, 1930), p. 191.

[7]Richard Poirier, The Comic Sense of Henry James (New York: Oxford University Press, 1960), p. 42.

### The Portrait of a Lady

[1]Henry James, The Art of the Novel: Critical Prefaces, ed. Richard P. Blackmar (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1934) p. 52.

[2]Ibid.

[3]Ibid., p. 51.

[4]Henry James, The Portrait of a Lady (New York: The New American Library, Inc., 1963) p. 23. All quotes from this work will be taken from the same source and the page numbers noted in brackets.

[5]Charles Samuels, The Ambguity of Henry James (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1971), p. 115.

## The Bostonians

[1]Henry James, The Notebooks of Henry James, eds. F. V. Mathiessen and Kenneth B. Murdock (New York: Oxford University Press, 1947) p. 48.

[2]Cargill, p. 133.

[3]Henry James, The Notebooks of Henry James, (1947), p. 49.

[4]Ibid., p. 124.

[5]Ibid., p. 46.

[6]Poirier, p. 140.

[7]Cargill, p. 134, 137.

[8]Ibid.

[9]Carl Van Doren, The American Novel, (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1921) p. 203.

[10]Henry James, The Notebooks of Henry James, (1947), p. 47.

[11]Ibid.

[12]Ibid., p. 49.

[13]Ibid., p. 47.

[14]Charles Samuels, p. 91.

[15]Van Doren, p. 203.

[16]Cargill, p. 136.

[17]Bruce Robert McElderry, Henry James, (New York: Twayne Publishers, Inc., 1965), p. 64.

[18]Samuelson, p. 98-99.

[19]Cargill, p. 137.

[20]Henry James, The Bostonians (New York: Macmillan and Co., 1886) p. 449. All quotes from this work will be from this source and the page numbers noted in brackets.

[21]Cargill, p. 137.

## The Spoils of Poynton

[1]Henry James, The Notebooks of Henry James (1947), p. 137.

[2]Ibid.

[3]Henry James, The Art of the Novel, eds. Richard P. Blackmur. (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1934), pp. 126-131.

[4]Ibid., p. 131.

[5]Samuels, p. 78.

[6]Henry James, The Art of the Novel (1934), p. 132.

[7]Ibid.

[8]Henry James, The Aspern Papers and The Spoils of Poynton (New York: Dell Publishing Co., Inc., 1973) p. 151. All subsequent quotes from this work are from this source and the page numbers indicated in brackets.

[9]Cargill, p. 227.

[10]Henry James, The Art of the Novel (1934) pp. 128-9.

The Golden Bowl

[1]Walter F. Wright, The Madness of Art (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1962) p. 242.

[2]Cargill, pp. 391-3.

[3]Henry James, The Golden Bowl (London: The Bodley Head, 1971) p. 126. All quotes of this work are taken from this source and page numbers are indicated in brackets.

[4]Ibid., p. 344.

[5]Wright, p. 252.

[6]Ibid., pp. 252-3.

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